AS A MAN LIVES

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He turned round with a swift movement

AS A MAN LIVES

By

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Illustrated by Stanley L. Wood

London:

Ward, Lock & Co., Limited,

Warwick House, Salisbury Square, E.C.

New York and Melbourne.

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AS A MAN LIVES

CHAPTER I

THE YELLOW HOUSE

POSITIVELY every one, with two unimportant exceptions, had called upon us. The Countess had driven over from Sysington Hall, twelve miles away, with two anæmic-looking daughters, who had gushed over our late roses and the cedar trees which shaded the lawn. The Holgates of Holgate Brand and Lady Naselton of Naselton had presented themselves on the same afternoon. Many others had come in their train, for what these very great people did the neighbourhood was bound to endorse. There was a little veiled anxiety, a few elaborately careless questions as to the spelling of our name; but when my father had mentioned the second "f," and made a casual allusion to the Warwickshire Ffolliots—with whom we were not indeed on speaking terms, but who were certainly our cousins—a distinct breath of relief was followed

by a gush of mild cordiality. There were wrong Ffolliots and right Ffolliots. We belonged to the latter. No one had made a mistake or compromised themselves in any way by leaving their cards upon a small country vicar and his daughters. And earlier callers went away and spread a favourable report. Those who were hesitating, hesitated no longer. Our little carriage-drive, very steep and very hard to turn in, was cut up with the wheels of many chariots. The whole county within a reasonable distance came, with two exceptions. And those two exceptions were Mr. Bruce Deville of Deville Court, on the borders of whose domain our little church and vicarage lay, and the woman who dwelt in the "Yellow House."

I asked Lady Naselton about both of them one afternoon. Her ladyship, by the by, had been one of our earliest visitors, and had evinced from the first a strong desire to become my sponsor in Northshire society. She was middle-aged, bright, and modern—a thorough little cosmopolitan, with a marked absence in her deportment and mannerisms of anything bucolic or rural. I enjoyed talking to her, and this was her third visit. We were sitting out upon the lawn, drinking afternoon tea, and making the best of a brilliant October afternoon. A yellow gleam from the front of that oddly-shaped little house, flashing

through the dark pine trees, brought it into my mind. It was only from one particular point in our garden that any part of it was visible at all. It chanced that I occupied that particular spot, and during a lull in the conversation it occurred to me to ask a question.

"By the by," I remarked, "our nearest neighbours have not yet been to see us?"

"Your nearest neighbours!" Lady Naselton repeated. "Whom do you mean? There are a heap of us who live close together."

"I mean the woman who lives at that little shanty through the plantation," I answered, inclining my head towards it. "It is a woman who lives there, isn't it? I fancy that some one told me so, although I have not seen anything of her. Perhaps I was mistaken."

Lady Naselton lifted both her hands. There was positive relish in her tone when she spoke. The symptoms were unmistakable. Why do the nicest women enjoy shocking and being shocked?

I could see that she was experiencing positive pleasure from my question.

"My dear Miss Ffolliot!" she exclaimed. "My dear girl, don't you really know anything about her? Hasn't anybody told you anything?"

I stifled an imaginary yawn in faint protest against her unbecoming exhilaration. I have not many weaknesses, but I hate scandal and scandal-

mongering. All the same I was interested, although I did not care to gratify Lady Naselton by showing it.

"Remember, that I have only been here a week or two," I remarked; "certainly not long enough to have mastered the annals of the neighbourhood. I have not asked any one before. No one has ever mentioned her name. Is there really anything worth hearing?"

Lady Naselton looked down and brushed some crumbs from her lap with a delicately gloved hand. She was evidently an epicure in story-telling. She was trying to make it last out as long as possible.

"Well, my dear girl, I should not like to tell you all that people say," she began, slowly. "At the same time, as you are a stranger to the neighbourhood, and, of course, know nothing about anybody, it is only my duty to put you on your guard. I do not know the particulars myself. I have never inquired. But she is not considered to be at all a proper person. There is something very dubious about her record."

"How deliciously vague!" I remarked, with involuntary irony. "Don't you know anything more definite?"

"I find no pleasure in inquiring into such matters," Lady Naselton replied a little stiffly.

"The opinion of those who are better able to judge is sufficient for me."

"One must inquire, or one cannot, or should not, judge," I said. "I suppose that there's something which she does, or does not, do?"

"It is something connected with her past life, I believe," Lady Naselton remarked.

"Her past life? Isn't it supposed to be rather interesting nowadays to have a past?"

I began to doubt whether, after all, I was going to be much of a favourite with Lady Naselton. She set her teacup down, and looked at me with distinct disapproval in her face.

"Amongst a certain class of people it may be," she answered, severely; "not"—with emphasis—"in Northshire society; not in any part of it with which I am acquainted, I am glad to say. You must allow me to add, Miss Ffolliot, that I am somewhat surprised to hear you, a clergyman's daughter, express yourself so."

A clergyman's daughter. I was continually forgetting that. And, after all, it is much more comfortable to keep one's self in accord with one's environment. I pulled myself together, and explained with much surprise—

"I only asked a question, Lady Naselton. I wasn't expressing my own views. I think that women with a past are very horrid. One is so utterly tired of them in fiction that one does not

want to meet them in real life. We won't talk of this at all. I'm not really interested. Tell me about Mr. Deville instead."

Now this was a little unkind of me, for I knew quite well that Lady Naselton was brimming with eagerness to tell me a good deal about this undesirable neighbour of ours. As it happened, however, my question afforded her a fresh opportunity, of which she took advantage.

"To tell you of one, unfortunately, is to tell you of the other," she said, significantly.

I decided to humour her, and raised my eyebrows in the most approved fashion.

"How shocking!" I exclaimed.

I was received in favour again. My reception of the innuendo had been all that could be desired.

"We consider it a most flagrant case," she continued, leaning over towards me confidentially. "I am thankful to say that of the two Bruce Deville is the least blamed."

"Isn't that generally the case?" I murmured. "It is the woman who has to bear the burden."

"And it is generally the woman who deserves it," Lady Naselton answered, promptly. "It is my experience, at any rate, and I have seen a good deal more of life than you. In the present case there can be no doubt about it. The woman actually followed him down here, and took up her quarters almost at his gates whilst he was

away. She was there with scarcely a stick of furniture in the house for nearly a month. When he came back, would you believe it, the house was furnished from top to bottom with things from the Court. The carts were going backwards and forwards for days. She even went up and selected some of the furniture herself. I saw it all going on with my own eyes. Oh ! it was the most barefaced thing !"

"Tell me about Mr. Deville," I interrupted hastily. "I have not seen him yet. What is he like ?"

"Bruce Deville," she murmured to herself, thoughtfully. Then she was silent for a moment. Something that was almost like a gleam of sorrow passed across her face. Her whole expression was changed.

"Bruce Deville is my godson," she said, slowly. "I suppose that is why I feel his failure the more keenly."

"He is a failure, then ?" I asked. "Some one was talking about him yesterday, but I only heard fragments here and there. Isn't he very quixotic, and very poor ?"

"Poor !" She repeated the word with peculiar emphasis. Then she rose from her chair, and walked a step or two towards the low fence which enclosed our lawn.

"Come here, child."

I stood by her side looking across the sunlit stretch of meadows and undulating land. A very pretty landscape it was. The farmhouses, with their grey fronts and red-tiled roofs, and snug rickyards close at hand, had a particularly prosperous and picturesque appearance. The land was mostly arable and well-cultivated; field after field of deep golden stubble, and rich, dark soil stretched away to the dim horizon. She held out her hand.

"You see!" she exclaimed. "Does that look like a poor man's possessions?"

I shook my head.

"Every village there from east to west, every stone and acre belongs to Bruce Deville, and has belonged to the Devilles for centuries. There is no other landowner on that side of the country. He is lord of the Manor of a dozen parishes!"

I was puzzled.

"Then why do people call him so miserably poor?" I asked. "They say that the Court is virtually closed, and that he lives the life of a hermit, almost without servants even."

"He either is or says he is as poor as Job," Lady Naselton continued, resuming her seat. "He is a most extraordinary man. He was away from the country altogether for twelve years, wandering about, without any regular scheme of travel, all over the world. People met him or

heard of him in all manner of queer and out-of-the-way places. Then he lived in London for a time, and spent a fortune—I don't know that I ought to say anything about that to you—on Marie Leparte, the singer. One day he came back suddenly to the Court, which had been shut up all this time, and took up his quarters there in a single room with an old servant. He gave out that he was ruined, and that he desired neither to visit nor to be visited. He behaved in such an extraordinary manner to those who did go to see him, that they are not likely to repeat the attempt."

"How long has he been living there?" I asked.

"About four years."

"I suppose that you see him sometimes?"

She shook her head sadly.

"Very seldom. Not oftener than I can help. He is changed so dreadfully."

"Tell me what he is like."

"Like! Do you mean personally? He is ugly—hideously ugly—especially now that he takes so little care of himself. He goes about in clothes my coachman would decline to wear, and he slouches. I think a man who slouches is detestable."

"So do I," I assented. "What a very unpleasant neighbour to have!"

"Oh, that isn't the worst," she continued. "He is impossible in every way. He has a brutal temper and a brutal manner. No one could possibly take him for a gentleman. He is cruel and reckless, and he does nothing but loaf. There are things said about him which I should not dare to repeat to you. I feel it deeply; but it is no use disguising the fact. He is an utter and miserable failure."

"On the whole," I remarked, resuming my chair, "it is perhaps well that he has not called. I might not like him."

Lady Naselton's hard little laugh rang out upon the afternoon stillness. The idea seemed to afford her infinite but bitter amusement.

"Like him, my dear! Why, he would frighten you to death. Fancy any one liking Bruce Deville! Wait until you've seen him. He is the most perfect prototype of degeneration in a great family I have ever come in contact with. The worst of it is, too, that he was such a charming boy. Why, isn't that Mr. Ffolliot coming?" she added, in an altogether different tone. "I am so glad that I am going to meet him at last."

I looked up and followed her smiling gaze. My father was coming noiselessly across the smooth, green turf towards us. We both of us watched him for a moment, Lady Naselton with

a faint look of surprise in her scrutiny. My father was not in the least of the type of the ordinary country clergyman. He was tall and slim, and carried himself with an air of calm distinction. His clean-shaven face was distinctly of the intellectual cast. His hair was only slightly grey, his eyes were soft, and his mouth was mobile and benevolent. His person in every way was faultless and immaculate, from the tips of his long fingers to the spotless white cravat which alone redeemed the sombreness of his clerical attire. I murmured a few words of introduction, and he bowed over Lady Naselton's hand with a smile which women generally found entrancing.

"I am very glad to meet Lady Naselton," he said, courteously. "My daughter has told me so much of your kindness to her."

Lady Naselton made some pleasing and conventional reply. My father turned to me.

"Have you some tea, Kate?" he asked. "I have been making a long round of calls, and it is a little exhausting."

"I have some, but it is not fit to drink," I answered, striking the gong. "Mary shall make some fresh. It will only take a minute or two."

My father acquiesced silently. He was fastidious in small things, and I knew better than to offer him cold tea. He drew up a basket-chair to us and sat down with a little sigh of relief.

"You have commenced your work here early," Lady Naselton remarked. "Do you think that you are going to like these parts?"

"The country is delightful," my father answered readily. "As to the work—well, I scarcely know. Rural existence is such a change after the nervous life of a great city."

"You had a large parish at Belchester, had you not?" Lady Naselton asked.

"A very large one," he answered. "I am fond of work. I have always been used to large parishes."

And two curates, I reflected silently. Lady Naselton was looking sympathetic.

"You will find plenty to do here, I believe," she remarked. "The schools are in a most backward condition. My husband says that unless there is a great change in them very soon we shall be having the School Board."

"We must try and prevent that," my father said, gravely. "Of course I have to remember that I am only curate-in-charge here, but still I shall do what I can. My youngest daughter Alice is a great assistance to me in such matters. By the by, where is Alice?" he added, turning to me.

"She is in the village somewhere," I answered. "She will not be home for tea. She has gone to see an old woman—to read to her, I think."

My father sighed gently. "Alice is a good girl," he said.

I bore the implied reproof complacently. My father sipped his tea for a moment or two, and then asked a question.

"You were speaking of some one when I crossed the lawn?" he remarked. "Some one not altogether a desirable neighbour I should imagine from Lady Naselton's tone. Would it be a breach of confidence——"

"Oh, no," I interrupted. "Lady Naselton was telling me all about the man that lives at the Court—our neighbour, Mr. Bruce Deville."

My father set his cup down abruptly. His long walk had evidently tired him. He was more than ordinarily pale. He moved his basket-chair a few feet further back into the deep, cool shade of the cedar tree. For a second or two his eyes were half closed and his eyelids quivered.

"Mr. Bruce Deville," he repeated, softly—"Bruce Deville! It is somewhat an uncommon name."

"And somewhat an uncommon man!" Lady Naselton remarked, drily. "A terrible black sheep he is, Mr. Ffolliot. If you really want to achieve a triumph you should attempt his conversion. You should try and get him to come to church. Fancy Bruce Deville in church! The walls would crack and the windows fall in!"

"My predecessor was perhaps not on good terms with him," my father suggested, softly. "I have known so many unfortunate cases in which the squire of the parish and the vicar have not been able to hit it off."

Lady Naselton shook her head. She had risen to her feet, and was holding out a delicately gloved hand.

"No, it is not that," she said. "No one could hit it off with Bruce Deville. I was fond of him once; but I am afraid that he is a very bad lot. I should advise you to give him as wide a berth as possible. Listen. Was that actually six o'clock? I must go this second. Come over and see me soon, won't you, Miss Ffolliot, and bring your father? I will send a carriage for you any day you like. It is such an awful pull up to Naselton. Goodbye."

She was gone with a good deal of silken rustle, and a faint emission of perfume from her trailing skirt. Notwithstanding his fatigue, my father accompanied her across the lawn, and handed her into her pony-carriage. He remained several minutes talking to her earnestly after she had taken her seat and gathered up the reins, and it seemed to me that he had dropped his voice almost to a whisper. Although I was but a few paces off I could hear nothing of what they were saying. When at last the carriage drove off and

he came back to me, he was thoughtful, and there was a dark shade upon his face. He sat quite still for several moments without speaking. Then he looked up at me abruptly.

"If Lady Naselton's description of our neighbour is at all correct," he remarked, "he must be a perfect ogre."

I nodded.

"One would imagine so. He is her godson, but she can find nothing but evil to say of him."

"Under which circumstances it would be as well for us—for you girls especially—to carefully avoid him," my father continued, keeping his clear, grey eyes steadily fixed upon my face. "Don't you agree with me?"

"Most decidedly I do," I answered.

But, curiously enough, notwithstanding his evil reputation—perhaps because of it—I was already beginning to feel a certain amount of unaccountable interest in Mr. Bruce Deville.

CHAPTER II

ON THE MOOR

AFTER tea my father went to his study, for it was late in the week, and he was a most conscientious writer of sermons. I read for an hour, and then, tired alike of my book and my own company, I strolled up and down the drive. This restlessness was one of my greatest troubles. When the fit came I could neither work nor read nor think connectedly. It was a phase of incipient dissatisfaction with life, morbid, but inevitable. At the end of the drive nearest the road, I met Alice, my youngest sister, walking briskly with a book under her arm, and a quiet smile upon her homely face. I watched her coming towards me, and I almost envied her. What a comfort to be blessed with a placid disposition and an optimistic frame of mind!

"Well, you look as though you had been enjoying yourself," I remarked, placing myself in her way.

"So I have—after a fashion," she answered,

good-humouredly. "Are you wise to be without a hat, Kate? To look at your airy attire one would imagine that it was summer instead of autumn. Come back into the house with me."

I laughed at her in contempt. There was a difference indeed between my muslin gown and the plain black skirt and jacket, powdered with dust, which was Alice's usual costume.

"Have you ever known me to catch cold through wearing thin clothes or going without a hat?" I asked. "I am tired of being indoors. There have been people here all the afternoon. I wonder that your conscience allows you to shirk your part of the duty and leave all the tiresome entertaining to be done by me!"

She looked at me with wide-opened eyes and a concerned face. Alice was always so painfully literal.

"Why, I thought that you liked it!" she exclaimed. I was in an evil mood, and I determined to shock her. It was never a difficult task.

"So I do sometimes," I answered; "but to-day my callers have been all women, winding up with an hour and a half of Lady Naselton. One gets so tired of one's own sex! Not a single man all the afternoon. Somebody else's husband to pass the bread-and-butter would have been a god-send!"

Alice pursed up her lips, and turned her head away with a look of displeasure.

"I am surprised to hear you talk like that, Kate," she said, quietly. "Do you think that it is quite good taste?"

"Be off, you little goose!" I called after her as she passed on towards the house with quickened step and rigid head. The little sober figure turned the bend and disappeared without looking around. She was the perfect type of a clergyman's daughter—studiously conventional, unremittingly proper, inevitably a little priggish. She was the right person in the right place. She had the supreme good fortune to be in accord with her environment. As for me, I was a veritable black sheep. I looked after her and sighed.

I had no desire to go in; on the other hand, there was nothing to stay out for. I hesitated for a moment, and then strolled on to the end of the avenue. A change in the weather seemed imminent. A grey, murky twilight had followed the afternoon of brilliant sunshine, and a low south wind was moaning amongst the Norwegian firs. I leaned over the gate with my face turned towards the great indistinct front of Deville Court. There was nothing to look at. The trees had taken to themselves fantastic shapes, little wreaths of white mist were rising from the

hollows of the park. The landscape was grey, colourless, monotonous. My whole life was like that, I thought, with a sudden despondent chill. The lives of most girls must be unless they are domestic. In our little family Alice absorbed the domesticity. There was not one shred of it in my disposition.

I realised with a start that I was becoming morbid, and turned from the gate towards the house. Suddenly I heard an unexpected sound —the sound of voices close at hand. I stopped short and half turned round. A deep voice rang out upon the still, damp air—

"Get over, Madam! Get over, Marvel!"

There was the sound of the cracking of a whip and the soft patter of dogs' feet as they came along the lane below—a narrow thoroughfare which was bounded on one side by our wall and on the other by the open stretch of park at the head of which stood Deville Court. There must have been quite twenty of them, all of the same breed—beagles—and amongst them two people were walking, a man and a woman. The man was nearest to me, and I could see him more distinctly. He was tall and very broad, with a ragged beard and long hair. He wore no collar, and there was a great rent in his shabby shooting-coat. Of his features I could see nothing. He wore knickerbockers, and stockings, and thick shoes.

He was by no means an ordinary-looking person, but he was certainly not prepossessing. The most favourable thing about him was his carriage, which was upright and easy, but even that was in a measure spoilt by a distinct suggestion of surliness. The woman by his side I could only see very indistinctly. She was slim, and wore some sort of a plain tailor gown, but she did not appear to be young. As they came nearer to me, I slipped from the drive on to the verge of the shrubbery, standing for a moment in the shadow of a tall laurel bush. I was not seen, but I could hear their voices. The woman was speaking.

"A new vicar, or curate-in-charge, here, isn't there, Bruce? I fancy I heard that one was expected."

A sullen, impatient growl came from her side.

"Ay, some fellow with a daughter, Morris was telling me. The parson was bound to come, I suppose, but what the mischief does he want with a daughter?"

A little laugh from the woman—a pleasant, musical laugh.

"Daughters, I believe—I heard some one say that there were two. What a misogynist you are getting! Why shouldn't the man have daughters if he likes? I really believe that there are two of them."

There was a contemptuous snort, and a moment's silence. They were exactly opposite to me now, but the hedge and the shadow of the laurels beneath which I was standing completely shielded me from observation. The man's huge form stood out with almost startling distinctness against the grey sky. He was lashing the thistles by the side of the road with his long whip.

"Maybe!" he growled. "I've seen but one—a pale-faced, black-haired chit."

I smothered a laugh. I was the pale-faced, black-haired chit, but it was scarcely a polite way of alluding to me, Mr. Bruce Deville. When they had gone by I leaned over the gate again, and watched them vanish amongst the shadows. The sound of their voices came to me indistinctly; but I could hear the deep bass of the man as he slung some scornful exclamation out upon the moist air. His great figure, looming unnaturally large through the misty twilight, was the last to vanish. It was my first glimpse of Mr. Bruce Deville of Deville Court.

I turned round with a terrified start. Almost at my side some heavy body had fallen to the ground with a faint groan. A single step, and I was bending over the prostrate form of a man. I caught his hand and gazed into his face with horrified eyes. It was my father. He must have been within a yard of me when he fell.

His eyes were half closed, and his hands were cold. Gathering up my skirts in my hand, I ran swiftly across the lawn into the house.

I met Alice in the hall. "Get some brandy!" I cried, breathlessly. "Father is ill—out in the garden! Quick!"

She brought it in a moment. Together we hurried back to where I had left him. He had not moved. His cheeks were ghastly pale, and his eyes were still closed. I felt his pulse and his heart, and unfastened his collar.

"There is nothing serious the matter—at least I think not," I whispered to Alice. "It is only a fainting fit."

I rubbed his hands, and we forced some brandy between his lips. Presently he opened his eyes, and raised his head a little, looking half fearfully around.

"It was her voice," he whispered, hoarsely. "It came to me through the shadows! Where is she? What have you done with her? There was a rustling of the leaves—and then I heard her speak!"

"There is no one here but Alice and myself," I said, bending over him. "You must have been fancying things. Are you better?"

"Better!" He looked up at both of us, and the light came back into his face.

"Ah! I see! I must have fainted!" he ex-

claimed. "I remember the study was close, and I came to get cool. Yet, I thought—I thought——"

I held out my arm, and he staggered up. He was still white and shaken, but evidently his memory was returning.

"I remember it was close in the study," he said—"very close; I was tired too. I must have walked too far. I don't like it though. I must see a doctor; I must certainly see a doctor!"

Alice bent over him full of sympathy, and he took her arm. I walked behind him in silence. A curious thought had taken possession of me. I could not get rid of the impression of my father's first words, and his white, terrified face. Was it indeed a wild fancy of his, or had he really heard this voice which had stirred him so deeply? I tried to laugh at the idea. I could not. His cry was so natural, his terror so apparent! He had heard a voice. He had been stricken with a sudden terror. Whose was the voice—whence his fear of it? I watched him leaning slightly upon Alice's arm, and walking on slowly in front of me towards the house. Already he was better. His features had reassumed their customary air of delicate and reserved strength. I looked at him with new and curious eyes. For the first time I wondered whether there might be another world, or the ashes of an old one beneath that grey, impenetrable mask.

CHAPTER III

MR. BRUCE DEVILLE

MY father's first sermon was a great success. As usual, it was polished, eloquent, and simple, and withal original. He preached without manuscript, almost without notes, and he took particular pains to keep within the comprehension of his tiny congregation. Lady Naselton, who waited for me in the aisle, whispered her warm approval.

"Whatever induced your father to come to such an out-of-the-way hole as this?" she exclaimed, as we passed through the porch into the fresh, sunlit air. "Why, he is an orator! He should preach at cathedrals! I never heard any one whose style I like better. But all the same it is a pity to think of such a sermon being preached to such a congregation. Don't you think so yourself?"

I agreed with her heartily.

"I wonder that you girls let him come here and bury himself, with his talents," she continued.

"I had not much to do with it," I reminded her. "You forget that I have lived abroad all my life; I really have only been home for about eight or nine months."

"Well, I should have thought that your sister would have been more ambitious for him," she declared. "However, it's not my business, of course. Since you are here, I shall insist, positively insist, upon coming every Sunday. My husband says that it is such a drag for the horses. Men have such ridiculous ideas where horses are concerned. I am sure that they take more care of them than they do of their wives. Come and have tea with me to-morrow, will you?"

"If I can," I promised. "It all depends upon what Providence has in store for me in the shape of callers."

"There is no one left to call," Lady Naselton declared, with her foot upon the carriage step. "I looked through your card plate the other day whilst I was waiting for you. You will be left in peace for a little while now."

"You forget our neighbour," I answered, laughing. "He has not called yet, and I mean him to."

Lady Naselton leaned back amongst the soft cushions of her barouche, and smiled a pitying smile at me.

"You need not wait for him, at any rate," she

said. "If you do you will suffer for the want of fresh air."

The carriage drove off, and I skirted the churchyard, and made my way round to the Vicarage gate. Away across the park I could see a huge knickerbockered figure leaning over a gate, with his back to me, smoking a pipe. It was not a graceful attitude, nor was it a particularly reputable way of spending a Sunday morning.

I was reminded of him again as I walked up the path towards the house. A few yards from our dining-room window a dog was lying upon a flower-bed edge. As I approached, it limped up, whining, and looked at me with piteous brown eyes. I recognised the breed at once. It was a beagle—one of Mr. Deville's without a doubt. It lay at my feet with its front paw stretched out, and when I stooped down to pat it, it wagged its tail feebly, but made no effort to rise. Evidently its leg was broken.

I fetched some lint from the house, and commenced to bind up the limb as carefully as possible. The dog lay quite still, whining and licking my hand every now and then. Just as I was finishing off the bandage I became conscious that some one was approaching the garden—a firm, heavy tread was crossing the lane. In a moment or two a gruff voice sounded almost at my elbow.

"I beg pardon, but I think one of my dogs is here."

The words were civil enough, but the tone was brusque and repellant. I looked round without removing my hands from the lint. Our neighbour's appearance was certainly not encouraging. His great frame was carelessly clad in a very old shooting-suit, which once might have been of good cut and style, but was now only fit for the rag dealer. He wore a grey flannel shirt with a turn-down collar of the same material. His face, whatever its natural expression might have been, was disfigured just then with a dark, almost a ferocious, scowl. His hand was raised, as though unwillingly, to his cap, and a pair of piercing grey eyes were flashing down upon me from beneath his heavily marked eyebrows. He stood frowning down from his great height, a singularly powerful and forbidding object.

I resumed my task.

"No doubt it is your dog!" I said, calmly. "But you must wait until I have finished the bandage. You should take better care of your animals! Perhaps you don't know that its leg is broken."

He got down on his knees at once without glancing at me again. He seemed to have forgotten my very existence.

"Lawless," he exclaimed, softly—"little lady,

little lady, what have you been up to? Oh, you silly little woman!"

The animal, with the rank ingratitude of its kind, wriggled frantically out of my grasp and fawned about its master in a paroxysm of delight. I was so completely forgotten that I was able to observe him at my ease. His face and voice had changed like magic. Then I saw that his features, though irregular, were powerful and not ill-shaped, and that his ugly flannel shirt was at any rate clean. He continued to ignore my presence, and, taking the dog up into his arms, tenderly examined the fracture.

"Poor little lady!" he murmured. "Poor little Lawless. One of those damned traps of Harrison's, I suppose. I shall kill that fellow some day!" he added, savagely, under his breath.

I rose to my feet and shook out my skirts. There are limits to one's tolerance.

"You are perfectly welcome," I remarked, quietly.

There was no doubt as to his having forgotten my presence. He looked up with darkened face. Lady Naselton was perfectly right. He was a very ugly man.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I had quite forgotten that you were here. In fact, I thought that you had gone away. Thank you for

attending to the dog. That will do very nicely until I get it home," he added, touching the bandage.

"Until you get it home!" I repeated. "Thank you! Do you think that you can bandage better than that?"

I looked down with some scorn at his large, clumsy hands. After all, were they so very clumsy, though? They were large and brown, but they were not without a certain shapeliness. They looked strong, too. He bore the glance with perfect equanimity, and, taking the two ends of the lint into his hands, commenced to draw them tighter.

"Well, you see, I shall set the bone properly when I get back," he said. "This is fairly done, though, for an amateur. Thank you—and good morning."

He was turning brusquely away with the dog under his arm, but I stopped him.

"Who is Harrison?" I asked, "and why does he set traps?"

He frowned, evidently annoyed at having to stay and answer questions.

"Harrison is a small tenant farmer who objects to my crossing his land."

"Objects to your crossing his land?" I repeated, vaguely.

"Yes, yes. I take these dogs after hares, you

know—beagling, we call it. Sometimes I am forced to cross his farm if a hare is running, although I never go there for one. He objects, and so he sets traps."

"Is he your tenant?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Why don't you get rid of him, then? I wouldn't have a man who would set traps on my land."

He frowned, and his tone was distinctly impatient. He was evidently weary of the discussion.

"I cannot. He has a long lease. Good morning."

"Good morning, Mr. Deville."

He looked over his shoulder.

"You know my name!"

"Certainly. Don't you know mine?"

"No."

"Let me introduce myself, then. I am Miss Ffolliot—the pale-faced chit, you know!" I added, maliciously. "My father is the new vicar."

I was standing up before him with my hands clasped behind my back, and almost felt the flash of his dark, fiery eyes as they swept over me. I could not look away from him.

There was a distinct change in his whole appearance. At last he was looking at me with genuine interest. The lines of his mouth had

come together sharply, and his face was as black as thunder.

"Ffolliot?" he repeated, slowly—"Ffolliot? How do you spell it?"

"Anyhow, so long as you remember the two F's!" I answered, suavely. "Generally, double F, O, double L, I, O, T. Rather a pretty name, we think, although I am afraid that you don't seem to like it. Oh! here's my father coming. Won't you stay, and make his acquaintance?"

My father, returning from the church, with his surplice under his arm, had been attracted by the sight of a strange man talking to me on the lawn, and was coming slowly over towards us. Mr. Deville turned round rather abruptly. The two men met face to face, my father dignified, correct, severe, Bruce Deville untidy, ill-clad, with sullen, darkened face, lit by the fire which flashed from his eyes. Yet there was a certain dignity about his bearing, and he met my father's eyes resolutely. The onus of speech seemed to rest with him, and he accepted it.

"I need no introduction to Mr. Ffolliot," he said, sternly. "I am afraid that I can offer you no welcome to Northshire. This is a surprise."

My father looked him up and down with stony severity.

"So far as I am concerned, sir," he said, "I desire no welcome from you. Had I known that

you were to be amongst my near neighbours, I should not have taken up my abode here for however short a time."

"The sentiment," remarked Mr. Deville, "is altogether mutual. At any rate, we can see as little of each other as possible. I wish you a good morning."

He raised his cap presumably to me, although he did not glance in my direction, and went off across the lawn, taking huge strides, and crossing our flower-beds with reckless unconcern. My father watched him go with a dark shadow resting upon his face. He laid his fingers upon my arm, and their touch through my thin gown was like the touch of fire. I looked into his still, calm face, and I wondered. It was marvellous that a man should wear such a mask.

"You have known him?" I murmured. "Where? Who is he?"

My father drew a long, inward breath through his clenched teeth.

"That man," he said, slowly, with his eyes still fixed upon the now distant figure, "was closely, very closely, associated with the most unhappy chapter of my life. It was all over and done with before you were old enough to understand. It is many, many years ago, but I felt in his presence as though it were but yesterday. It is many years ago—but it hurts still—like a knife it hurts."

He held his hand pressed convulsively to his side, and stood watching the grey, stalwart figure now almost out of sight. His face was white and strained—some symptoms of yesterday's faintness seemed to be suggested by those wan cheeks and over bright eyes. Even I, naturally unsympathetic and callous, was moved. I laid my hand upon his shoulders.

"It is over and finished, you say, this dark chapter," I whispered, softly. "I would not think of it."

He looked at me for a moment in silence. The grey pallor still lingered in his thin, sunken cheeks, and his eyes were like cold fires. It was a face which might well guard its own secrets. I looked into it, and felt a vague sense of trouble stirring within me. Was that chapter of his life turned over and done with for ever? Was that secret at which he had hinted, and the knowledge of which lay between these two, wholly of the past, or was it a live thing? I could not tell. My father was fast becoming the enigma of my life.

"I cannot cease to think about it," he said, slowly. "I shall never cease to think about it until—until——"

"Until when?" I whispered.

"Until the end," he cried, hoarsely—"until the end, and God grant that it may not be long."

CHAPTER IV

OUR MYSTERIOUS NEIGHBOURS

THIS was a faithful and exact account of my meeting with the first of those two of our neighbours who seemed, according to Lady Naselton's report, to remain entirely outside the ordinary society of the place. Curiously enough, my meeting with the second one occurred on the very next afternoon.

We came face to face at a turning in the wood within a few yards of her odd little house, and the surprise of it almost took my breath away. Could this be the woman condemned to isolation by a whole neighbourhood—the woman on whose shoulders lay the burden of Bruce Deville's profligacy? I looked into the clear, dark eyes which met mine without any shadow of embarrassment—returning in some measure the keen interest of my own scrutiny—and the thing seemed impossible.

She spoke to me graciously, and as though to do so were quite a matter of course. Her voice

completed my subjugation. One may so often be deceived by faces, but the voice seems an infallible test.

"There is going to be a terrible storm," she said. "Won't you come in for a few minutes? You will scarcely be able to get home, and these trees are not safe."

Even while she was speaking the big raindrops began to fall. I gathered up my skirts, and hurried along by her side.

"It is very good of you," I said, breathlessly. "I am dreadfully afraid of a thunderstorm."

We crossed the trim little lawn, and in a moment I had passed the portals of the Yellow House. The front door opened into a low, square hall, hung with old-fashioned engravings against a background of dark oak. There were rugs upon the polished floor, and several easy chairs and lounges. By the side of one was a box from Mudie's, evidently just arrived, and a small wood fire was burning in the open grate. She laid her hand on the back of a low rocking-chair.

"Shall we sit here?" she suggested. "We can keep the door open and watch the storm. Or perhaps you would rather see as little of it as possible?"

I took the easy chair opposite to her.

"I don't mind watching it from inside," I

answered. "I am not really nervous, but those trees look horribly unsafe. One wants to be on the moor to enjoy a thunderstorm."

She looked at me with a faint smile, kindly but critically.

"No, you don't look particularly nervous," she said. "I wonder——"

A crash of thunder drowned the rest of her sentence.

In the silence which followed I found her studying my features intently. For some reason or other she seemed suddenly to have developed a new and strong interest in me. Her eyes were fastened upon my face. I began to feel almost uncomfortable.

She suddenly realised it, and broke into a little laugh.

"Forgive my staring at you so outrageously," she exclaimed. "You must think me a very rude person. It is odd to meet any one in the woods about here, you know; and I don't think that I have ever seen you before, have I?"

I shook my head.

"Probably not; unless you were at church yesterday," I said.

"Then I certainly have not, for I do not attend church," she answered. "But you don't live in church, do you?"

I laughed.

"Oh, no; but we have only been here a week or so," I told her. "My name is Kate Ffolliot. I am the daughter of the new vicar, or, rather, curate-in-charge."

Once more the hall was filled with white light.

There was a moment's breathless silence, and then the thunder came crashing over our heads. When it was over she was leaning forward with her face buried in her hands. She did not look up immediately.

"The thunder is awful!" I remarked. "I never heard it more directly overhead. I am afraid it is making you uncomfortable, is it not?"

She did not move her hands or answer me. I rose to my feet, frightened.

"What is the matter?" I cried. "Are you ill? Shall I call any one?"

She raised her head and looked at me, motioning me to sit down with a little wave of her hand. Evidently the storm had affected her nerves. Her face was paler than ever save where her clenched fingers seemed to have cut into her cheeks and left red livid marks on either side. Her dark eyes were unnaturally bright and dry. She had lost that dignified serenity of manner which had first impressed me.

"No; please sit down," she said, softly. "I am all right—only very foolish. That last crash was too awful. It was silly of me to mind,

though. I have seen worse storms. It is a sign of advancing age, I suppose."

I laughed. She was still regarding me fixedly.

"So we are neighbours, Miss Ffolliot?" she remarked.

"Close ones," I answered. "There is only a little belt of trees between us."

"I might have guessed who you were," she said. "For the moment, though, it did not occur to me. You are not," she said, with a faint smile, "at all what one looks for in a country clergyman's daughter."

"I have lived abroad nearly all my life," I said. "I was at school in Berlin and Heidelberg. My sister has always been my father's helper. I am afraid that parish work does not appeal to me at all."

"I am not surprised at that," she answered. "One needs a special disposition to interest one's self in those things, and, without being a physiognomist, I can tell you that you have not got it."

"People in the country are so stupid, and they take so much for granted," I remarked. "If I were a philanthropist, I should certainly choose to work in a city."

"You are quite right," she answered, absently. "Work amongst people who have learned to think a little for themselves is more inspiring."

We were silent for a moment or two. She was

evidently not interested in the discussion, so I did not attempt to carry it on. I turned a little in my chair to watch the storm outside, conscious all the time that her eyes scarcely left my face.

"I had grown so used," she said, presently, "to the rectory being empty, that I had quite forgotten the possibility of its being occupied again. The vicar used to live several miles away. I wonder that Mr. Deville did not know anything about you—that he did not know your name, at any rate."

Now I was sorry that she had mentioned Mr. Deville. I was doing my best to forget all that I had heard from Lady Naselton, and to form an independent judgment; but at her words the whole substance of it returned to me with a rush. I leaned back in my chair, and looked at her thoughtfully. She was a woman whose age might be anything between thirty-five and forty. She was plainly dressed, but with a quiet elegance which forbade any idea of a country dressmaker. She was too thin for her figure to be considered in any way good; but she was tall and graceful in all her movements. Her thick, brown hair, touched here and there with grey, was parted in the middle and vigorously brushed away from a low, thoughtful forehead, over which it showed a decided propensity to wave. Her features were good and strongly marked, and her skin was

perfect. Her eyes were bright and dark, her mouth piquant and humorous. She had no pretence to beauty, but she was certainly a very attractive and a very well-bred woman. I had never in all my life seen any one who suggested less those things at which Lady Naselton had hinted.

Perhaps she saw the slight change in my face at Mr. Deville's name. At any rate, she turned the conversation.

"Have you been living in the country before you came here, or near a large city?" she asked. "You will find it very quiet here!"

"We came from Belchester," I answered. "My father had a church in the suburbs there. It was very horrid; I was not there long, but I hated it. I think the most desolate country region in the world is better than suburbanism."

"I don't think that I agree with you," she smiled. "In a large community at any rate you are closer to the problems of life. I was at Belchester not long ago, and I found it very interesting."

"You were at Belchester!" I repeated in surprise.

"Yes; I was electioneering. I came to help Mr. Densham."

"What! The Socialist!" I cried.

She nodded, and I could see that the corners of her mouth were twitching with amusement.

"Yes. I thought that Belchester was rather an enlightened place. We polled over four thousand votes. I think if we had another week or two, and a few less helpers we might have got Mr. Densham in."

"A few less helpers!" I repeated, aimlessly.

"Yes. That is the worst of Labour and Socialist meetings. There is such a terrible craving amongst the working classes to become stump orators. You cannot teach them to hold their tongues. They make silly speeches, and of course the newspapers on the other side report them, and we get the discredit of their opinions. One always suffers most at the hands of one's friends."

I looked at her in silent wonder. I, too, had helped at that election—that is to say, I had driven about in the Countess of Applecorn's barouche with a great bunch of cornflower in my gown, and talked amiably to a lot of uninteresting people. I had a dim recollection of a one-horse waggonette which we had passed on the way preceded by a brass band and a lot of factory hands, and of Lady Applecorn raising her gold-rimmed eyeglass and saying something about the Socialist candidate.

"Did you make speeches—and that sort of thing?" I asked, hesitatingly.

She laughed outright.

"Of course I did! How else could I have helped? I am afraid that you are beginning to think that I am a very terrible person," she added, with a decided twinkle in her rich brown eyes.

"Please don't say that!" I begged. "Only I have been brought up always with people who shuddered at the very mention of the word both here and abroad, and I daresay that I have a wrong impression about it all. For one thing I thought it was only poor people who were Socialists."

For a moment she looked grave.

"True Socialism is the most fascinating of all doctrines for the rich and the poor, for all thoughtful men and women," she said, quietly. "It is a religion as well as the very core of politics. But we will not talk about that now. Are you interested in the new books? You might like to see some of these."

She pointed at the box. "I get all the new novels, but I read very few of them."

I looked them over as she handed the volumes out to me. I had read a good many books in which she was interested. We began to discuss them, casually at first, and then eagerly. An hour

or more must have slipped away. At last I looked at the clock and sprang up.

"You must have some tea," she said, with her hand on the bell. "Please do not hurry away."

I hesitated, but she seemed to take my consent for granted, and I suffered myself to be persuaded.

"Come and see my den while they bring it."

She opened a door on the left hand of the hall, and I passed by her side into a large room of irregular shape, from which French windows led out on to the trim little lawn. The walls were almost lined with books—my father's library did not hold so many. A writing-table drawn up to the window was covered with loose sheets of paper and works of reference turned upon their faces. For the rest the room was a marvel of delicate colouring and refined femininity. There were plenty of cosy chairs, and three-legged tables, with their burden of dainty china, rare statuettes, and many vases of flowers, mostly clustering yellow roses. But what absorbed my attention after my rapid glance around was the fact that Mr. Bruce Deville was sitting in a very comfortable chair near the window, reading one of the loose sheets of paper which he had taken from the desk.

He rose from his feet at the sound of the opening of the door, but he did not immediately look

up. He spoke to her, and I scarcely recognised his voice. His gruffness was gone! It was mellow and good-humoured.

"Marcia! Marcia! Why can't you leave poor Harris alone?" he said. "You will drive him out of his senses if you sling Greek at him like this. You women are so vindictive!"

"If you will condescend to turn round," she answered, smiling, "I shall be glad to know how you got in here, and what are you doing with my manuscript?"

He looked up, and the sheet fluttered from his fingers. He regarded me with undiluted astonishment. "Well, I came in at the window," he answered. "I was in a hurry to escape getting wet through. I had no idea that you had a visitor!"

I glanced towards her. She was in no way discomposed or annoyed.

"I am not inclined to walk this afternoon," she said. "Will you come down after dinner, about nine? I want to see you, but not just now."

He nodded, and took up his cap. At the window he looked back at me curiously. For a moment he seemed about to speak. He contented himself, however, with a parting bow, to which I responded. Directly he got outside the garden he took his pipe from his pocket and lit it.

The incident did not seem to have troubled her in any way. She pointed out some of the treasures of her room, elegant little trifles, collected in many countries of the world, but I am afraid I was not very attentive.

"Is Mr. Deville a relation of yours?" I asked, rather abruptly.

She had just taken down a little Italian statuette for my inspection, and she replaced it carefully before she answered.

"No. We are friends. I have known him for a good many years."

A tiny Burmese gong rang out from the hall. She came across the room towards me, smiling pleasantly.

"Shall we go and have some tea? I always want tea so much after a thunderstorm. I will show you some more of my Penates, if you like, afterwards."

I followed her into the hall, and took my tea from the hands of a prim little maidservant. With the Dresden cup between my fingers a sudden thought flashed into my mind. If only Lady Naselton could see me. Unconsciously my lips parted, and I laughed outright.

"Do forgive me," I begged. "Something came into my mind. It was too funny. I could not help laughing."

"To be able to laugh at one's thoughts is a

luxury," she answered. "I know a man who lived through a terrible illness solely because of his sense of humour. There are so many things to laugh at in the world, if only one sees them in the right light. Let me give you some more tea."

I set down my cup. "No more, thanks. That has been delicious. I wonder whether I might ask you a question?" I added. "I should like to if I might."

"Well, you certainly may," she answered, good-humouredly.

"Mr. Deville spoke of your work," I continued; "and of course I could see you had been writing. Do you write fiction? I think it is so delightful for women to do anything for themselves—any real work, I mean. Do you mind my asking?"

"I do not write fiction as a rule," she said, slowly. "I write for the newspapers. I was a correspondent for several years for one of the dailies. I write more now for a purpose. I am one of the 'abhorred tribe,' you know—a Socialist, or what people understand as a Socialist. Are you horrified?"

"Not in the least," I answered her; "only I should like to know more about it. From what I have heard about Socialism I should never have dreamed of associating it with—well, with Dresden cups and saucers, for instance," I laughed, motioning to her own.

Her eyes twinkled. "Poor child," she said, "you have all the old-fashioned ideas about us and our beliefs, I suppose. I am not sure that, if you were a properly regulated young lady, you would not get up and walk out of the house."

A shadow had fallen across the open doorway, and a familiar voice, stern, but tremulous with passion, took up her words.

"That is precisely what my daughter will do, madam! At once, and without delay! Do you hear, Kate?"

I rose to my feet dumb with amazement. My father's tall figure, drawn to its utmost height, stood out with almost startling vividness against the sunlit space beyond. A deep red flush was on his pale cheeks. His eyes seemed on fire with anger. My hostess rose to her feet with dignity.

"Your daughter is at liberty to remain or go at any time," she said, coolly. "I presume that I am addressing Mr. Ffolliot?"

She looked over my shoulder towards my father, and their eyes met. I looked from one to the other, conscious that something was passing outside my knowledge—something between those two. Her eyes had become like dull stones. Her face had grown strangely hard and cold. There was a brief period of intense silence, broken only by a slow, monotonous ticking of the hall clock and the flutter of the birds' wings from

amongst the elm trees outside. A breath of wind brought a shower of raindrops down on to the gravel path. A sparrow flew twittering into the hall and out again. Then it came to an end.

"Marcia!"

His single cry rang out like a pistol-shot upon the intense silence. He took a quick step across the threshold. She held out both her hands in front of her, and he stopped short.

"You had better go," she said. "You had better go quickly."

I went out and took my father's arm. He let me lead him away without a word; but he would have fallen several times if it had not been for my support. When we reached home he turned at once into the library.

"Go away, Kate," he said, wearily. "I must be alone. See that I am not disturbed."

I hesitated, but he insisted. I shut the door and left him. I, too, wanted to be alone. My brain was in a whirl. What was this past whose ghosts seemed rising up one by one to confront us? First there had been Mr. Deville, and now the woman whom my father had called Marcia. What were they to him? What had he to do with them? Where had their lives touched? I pressed my hot forehead against the window-pane, and looked across at the Yellow House. The sunlight was flashing and glistening upon

its damp, rain-soaked front. In the doorway a woman was standing, shading her eyes with her hand, and looking across the park. I followed her gaze, and saw for whom she was waiting. Bruce Deville was walking swiftly towards her. I saw him leap a fence to save a few yards, and he was taking huge and rapid strides. I turned away from my window and hid my face in my hands.

CHAPTER V

A SOUTH AMERICAN LETTER

NATURALLY I expected that some time that night my father would have spoken to me concerning the strange meeting at the house of the woman whom he had called Marcia. In a sense I feared what he might have to say. Already I was beginning to reckon those few hours as an epoch in my life. Never had I met any one whom in so short a time had attracted me so much. I found myself thinking of her continually, and the more I thought the more I scoffed at the idea of connecting in any way with her those things at which Lady Naselton had hinted. There seemed something almost grossly incongruous in any such idea. The more I thought of her the more resolute I became in putting all such thoughts behind me. And, apart from my judgment, which was altogether on her side, I was conscious of a vague personal attraction, almost a fascination, which had a wonderful effect on me. The manner of her life, her surroundings, that air

of quiet, forcible elegance, which seemed to assert itself alike in her house, her dress, and her conversation, were a revelation to me. She was original too, obviously intellectual, a woman who held her life well within control, and lived it fearlessly and self-reliantly. I had never met any one like it before, and I longed to see more of her. My one fear was lest my father should lay some stern embargo upon my association with her. In that case I had made up my mind not to yield without a struggle. I would be quite sure that it was not a matter of merely prejudice before I consented to give up what promised to be the most delightful friendship I had ever known.

But, rather to my surprise, and a little to my relief, my father ignored our afternoon's adventure when I saw him again. He came in to dinner as usual, carefully dressed, and ate and drank with his customary fine care that everything of which he partook should be of the best of its kind. After he had left the table we saw no more of him. He went straight to his study, and I heard the door shut and the key turned—a sign that he was on no account to be disturbed; and though I sat in the drawing-room until long after my usual time for retiring, and afterwards remained in my room till the small hours commenced to chime, his door remained locked. Yet in the morning he was down before us. He was standing at the window

when I came into the breakfast-room, and the clear morning light fell mercilessly on his white face, pallid and lined with the marks of his long vigil. It seemed to me that he greeted us both more quietly than usual.

During breakfast time I made a few remarks to him, but they passed unnoticed, or elicited only a monosyllabic reply. Alice spoke of the schools, but he seemed scarcely to hear. We all became silent. As we were on the point of rising, the unusual sound of wheels outside attracted our attention. A fly was passing slowly along the road beyond our hedge. I caught a glimpse of a woman's face inside, and half rose up.

"She is going away!" I exclaimed.

My father, too, had half risen. He made a movement as though to hurry from the room, but with an effort he restrained himself. The effect of her appearance upon him was very evident to me. His under lip was twitching, and his long, white fingers were nervously interlaced. Alice, bland and unseeing, glanced carelessly out of the window.

"It is our mysterious neighbour from the Yellow House," she remarked. "If a tithe of what people say about her is true we ought to rejoice that she is going away. It is a pity she is not leaving for good."

My father opened his lips as though about to

speak. He changed his mind, however, and left the room. The burden of her defence remained with me.

"If I were you I would not take any notice of what people say about her," I remarked. "In all probability you will only hear a pack of lies. I had tea with her yesterday afternoon, and she seemed to me to be a very well-bred and distinguished woman."

Alice looked at me with wide-open eyes, and an expression almost of horror in her face.

"Do you mean to say that you have been to see her, that you have been inside her house, Kate?" she cried.

I nodded.

"I was caught in the rain and she asked me in," I explained, coolly. "Afterwards I liked her so much that I was glad to stay to tea when she asked me. She is a very charming woman."

Alice looked at me blankly.

"But, Kate, didn't Lady Naselton tell you about her? Surely you have heard what people say?"

I shrugged my shoulders slightly.

"Lady Naselton told me a good many things," I answered; "but I do not make a point of believing everything disagreeable which I hear about people. Do you think that charitable yourself."

My sister's face hardened. She had all the

prejudices of her type, in her case developed before their time. She was the vicar's daughter, in whose eyes the very breath of scandal was like a devastating wind. Her point of view, and consequently her judgment, seemed to me alike narrow and cruel.

"You forget your position," she said, with cold indignation. "There are other reports of that woman besides Lady Naselton's. Depend upon it there is no smoke without fire. It is most indiscreet of you to have had any communication with her."

"That," I declared, "is a matter of opinion."

"I believe that she is not a nice woman," Alice said, firmly.

"And I shall believe her to be a very nice one until I know the contrary," I answered. "I know her and you do not, and I can assure you that she is much more interesting than any of the women who have called upon us round here."

Alice was getting angry with me.

"You prefer an interesting woman to a good one," she said, warmly.

"Without going quite so far as that, I certainly think that it is unfortunate that most of the good women whom one meets are so uninteresting," I answered. "Goodness seems so satisfying—in the case of repletion, I mean—it doesn't seem to leave room for anything else."

Whereupon Alice left me in despair, and I found myself face to face with my father. He looked at me in stern disapproval. There was a distinctly marked frown on his forehead.

"You are too fond of those flighty sayings, Kate," he remarked, sternly. "Let me hear less of them."

I made no reply. There were times when I was almost afraid of my father, when a suppressed irritation of manner seemed like the thin veneer beneath which a volcano was trembling. To-day the signs were there. I made haste to change the subject.

"The letters have just come," I said, holding out a little packet to him. There is one for you from a place I never heard of—somewhere in South America, I think."

He took them from me and glanced at the handwriting of the topmost one. Then for a short space of time I saw another man before me. The calm strength of his refined, thoughtful face was transformed. Like a flash the gleam of a dark passion lit up his brilliant eyes. His lips quivered, his fingers were clenched together. For a moment I thought he would have torn the letter into shreds unopened. With an evident effort, however, he restrained himself, and went out of the room bearing the letter in his hand.

I heard him walking about in his study all the

morning. At luncheon time he had quite recovered his composure, but towards its close he made, for us, a somewhat startling announcement.

"I am going to London this afternoon," he said, quietly.

"To London?" we both echoed.

"Yes. There is a little business there which requires my personal attention."

Under the circumstances Alice was even more surprised than I was.

"But how about Mr. Hewitt?" she reminded him, blankly. "We were to meet him at the schools at five o'clock this afternoon about the new ventilators."

"Mr. Hewitt must be put off until my return," my father answered. "The schools have done without them for ten years, so they can go on for another week. Can I trouble you for the Worcestershire sauce, Kate?"

This was my father's method of closing the subject. Alice looked at me with perplexed face, but my thoughts were elsewhere. I was wondering whether my father would undertake a commission for me at Debenham and Freebody's.

"Shall you be going West?" I asked him.

He looked up at me and hesitated for a moment.

"My business is in the City," he said, coldly. "What do you call West?"

"Regent Street," I answered.

He considered for a few moments.

"I may be near there," he said. "If so I will try to do what you require. Do not be disappointed if I should happen to forget about it, though. If it is important you had better send direct."

"I would rather you called if it wouldn't be bothering you," I told him. "There is some money to pay, and it would save my getting postal orders."

I left the room to write a note. When I came back my father had gone into his study. I followed him there, and, entering the room without knocking, found him bending over his desk.

He looked up at me and frowned.

"What do you want?" he said, sharply.

I explained, and he took the note from me, listening to the details of my commission, and making a note in his pocket-book.

"I will see to this for you if I can," he said. "I will not promise, because I shall have other and more important matters to take up my attention. In the meantime, I should be glad to be left undisturbed for an hour. I have some letters to write."

I left him at once, and I heard the key turn in the door after me. At half-past three a

fly arrived from the Junction, and he appeared upon the step carrying a small black bag in his hand.

"I shall be back," he said, "on Friday. Goodbye, Alice; goodbye, Kate."

We kissed him, and he got up in the carriage and drove off. Alice and I remained upon the doorstep looking at one another. We both felt that there was something mysterious about his sudden departure.

"Have you any idea what it means?" she asked me.

I shook my head.

"He has not told me anything," I said. "Didn't you say that he used to go to London often when you were at Belchester?"

Alice looked very grave.

"Yes," she said; "and that is one reason why we left the place. The people did not like it. He went away very often; and, indeed, old Colonel Dacre wrote to the Bishop about it."

"He was a meddlesome old duffer," I remarked, leaning against the door-post with my face turned towards the Yellow House.

"He was rather a busybody," Alice admitted; "but I am not surprised that he wrote to the Bishop. A good many other people used to complain about it. You were not in Belchester

very long, so of course you knew nothing about it."

"And do you mean to say that you have no idea at all why he went so often? You don't know what he did there, or anything, not even where he stayed?"

"Not the shred of an idea," Alice declared. "It used to worry me a great deal, and when I came here I hoped it was all over. Now it seems as though it were all beginning again!"

"I believe," I said, "that I know what took him up to London to-day."

"Really!" Alice cried, eagerly.

I nodded.

"It was a letter."

"One that he had this morning?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"Morris gave me the letters through the window," I answered. "There were only two for father. One was from Mr. Hewitt—that was about the schools you know, and the other was from somewhere in South America. It was that letter which took him to London."

She looked at me with knitted brows, and a general expression of perplexity.

"From South America! I never heard father speak of any one there."

"From South America," I repeated. "It was

a large square envelope, and the writing was very fine and delicate."

"I wonder," Alice suggested, thoughtfully, "whether we have any relatives out there of whom we do not know. It may be that. Perhaps they are poor, and——"

I interrupted her.

"This letter was not from a poor person," I declared, confidently. "The notepaper, or rather the envelope, was expensive, and in very good style. I believe there was a crest on the envelope."

"Still," Alice remarked, "we cannot be certain —especially if the letter was from South America —that it was the cause of his going to London."

"I think we can," I answered. "In one corner there were three words, written very small— "London about fifteenth."

We exchanged glances.

"To-day is the fifteenth," Alice remarked.

I nodded. It was true. My sister's eyes were full of trouble.

"I wonder," she said, softly, "what will be the end of it all? Sometimes I am almost afraid."

And I, who knew more than she did, was also troubled. Already I was growing to fear my father. Always he seemed to move amongst us with an air of stern repression, as though he were

indeed playing a part, wearing always a mask, and as though his real life lay somewhere else, somewhere in the past, or—worse still—somewhere in the present, far away from our quiet little village. I thought of all the stories I had read of men who had lived double lives—men with a double personality one side of whose life and actions must necessarily be a wholesale lie. The fear of something of this sort in connection with my father was gradually laying chill hold upon me. He fulfilled his small parish obligations, and carried himself through the little routine of our domestic life with a stern air of thoughtful abstraction, as though he were performing in a mechanical manner duties contemptible, trivial, and uninteresting, for some secret and hidden reason. Was there another life? My own eyes had shown me that there was another man. Twice had I seen this mask raised; first when he had come face to face with Bruce Deville, and again when he had found me talking with our curious neighbour beneath the roof of the Yellow House. Another man had leaped out then. Who was he? What was he? Did he exist solely in the past, or was there a present—worse still, a future—to be developed?

We were standing side by side at the window. Suddenly there was a diversion. Our gate was flung open. A tall figure came up the drive

towards the house. Alice watched it with curiosity.

"Here is a visitor," she remarked. "We had better go away."

I recognised him, and I remained where I was. After that little scene upon the lawn only last Sunday I certainly had not expected to see Mr. Bruce Deville again within the confines of our little demesne. Yet there he was, walking swiftly up the gravel walk—tall, untidy, and with that habitual contraction of the thick eyebrows which was almost a scowl. I stepped out to meet him, leaving Alice at the window. He regarded us coldly, and raised his cap with the stiffest and most ungracious of salutes.

"Is Mr. Ffolliot in?" he asked me. "I should like to have a word with him."

I ignored his question for a moment.

"Good morning, Mr. Deville," I said, quietly.

His colour rose a little. He was not so insensible as he tried to appear, but his bow was flagrantly ironical.

"Good morning, Miss Ffolliot," he answered, frigidly. "I should like a word with your father—if I could trouble you so far as to tell him that I am here."

"My father will be exceedingly sorry to have missed you," I answered, smiling upon him; "he is out just now."

His frown deepened, and he was obviously annoyed. He made ready to depart.

"Can you tell me when he will be in?" he asked. "I will call again."

"I am afraid that I cannot positively," I answered. "We expect him home on Friday, but I don't know at what time."

He turned round upon me with a sudden change on his face. His curiously coloured eyes seemed to have caught fire.

"Do you mean that he has gone away?" he asked, brusquely.

"He has gone to London this afternoon," I answered. "Can I give him any message from you?"

He stood quite still, and seemed to be looking me through and through. Then he drew a small time-table from his pocket.

"Annesly Junction, 3.30; St. Pancras, 7.50," he muttered to himself. "Thank you; good morning."

He turned upon his heel, but I called him back.

"Mr. Deville."

He stopped short and looked round. "I beg your pardon," he said; "I am in a hurry."

"Oh, very well," I answered. "I should be sorry to detain you. You dropped something when you took out your time-table, and it

occurred to me that you might want it again. That is all."

He came back with three great strides. A square envelope, to which I was pointing, lay on the ground almost at my feet. As he stooped to pick it up I too glanced at it for the second time. A little exclamation escaped from my lips. He looked at me inquiringly.

"Is anything the matter?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"Good morning, Mr. Deville."

He hesitated for a moment. He was evidently desirous of knowing why I had uttered that exclamation. I did not choose to satisfy him.

"I thought you made some remark," he said. "What was it?"

"It was nothing," I told him. "You are in a hurry, I think you said. Don't let me keep you."

He pocketed the envelope and strode away. Alice came out of the low window to me, looking after him with wide-open eyes.

"What an extraordinary man!" she exclaimed.

But I did not answer her immediately, I had found something else to think about. There was no possibility of any mistake. The handwriting upon the envelope which Mr. Deville had dropped was the same as that which had summoned my father to London.

CHAPTER VI

THE MILLIONAIRE

ON the Thursday following my father's departure for London Lady Naselton sent her carriage for me, and a note marked urgent. It contained only a few lines, evidently written in a hurry.

"NASELTON, *Thursday.*

"MY DEAR GIRL,—Put on your calling-frock, and come up to tea at once. The Romneys and a few other people are coming over, and Fred brought a most interesting man down from town this morning. I want you to know him. He is quite delightful to talk to, and is a millionaire! Come and help me entertain him.

"Yours ever,

"AMY NASELTON."

I laughed as I went upstairs to change my things. Lady Naselton was famed throughout the county as an inveterate matchmaker. Without a doubt

the millionaire who was delightful to talk to was already in her mind as the most suitable match for a poor country clergyman's daughter who had the misfortune to possess ambitions. I could tell by the fussy manner in which she greeted me that she considered the matter already almost settled. The room was full of people, but my particular victim was sitting alone in a recess. Evidently he had been kept back for my behoof. Lady Naselton, as though suddenly remembering his presence, brought him over and introduced him at once.

"Mr. Berdenstein," she said—"Miss Ffolliot. Will you see that Miss Ffolliot has some tea?" she added, smiling upon him blandly. "My servants all seem so stupid to-day."

I sat down and looked at him while he attended to my wants. At the first glance I disliked him. He was tall and dark, with sallow face and regular features of somewhat Jewish type. There was too much unction about his manner. He smiled continually, and showed his teeth too often. I found myself wondering whether he had made his million in a shop. I was forced to talk to him, however, and I settled myself down to be bored.

"You have not been in England long?" I asked.

"About three days," he answered.

His voice was not so bad. I looked at him again. His face was not a pleasant one, and he seemed to be scarcely at his ease, added to which something in his bearing indistinctly suggested a limited acquaintance with drawing-rooms such as Lady Naselton's. Yet it was possible that he was clever. His forehead was well shaped, and his mouth determined.

"Mr. Fred Naselton was the first man I saw in London," he went on. "It was a very odd thing to run against him before I was well off the ship."

"He was an old friend of yours?" I continued, purely for the sake of keeping up the conversation.

"Not very. Oh, no! Scarcely friend at all," he disclaimed. "I did him a turn in Rio last month. Nothing to speak of, but he was grateful."

"Where?" I asked, abruptly.

"Rio," he repeated. "Rio Janeiro—you know, capital of South America."

I turned and faced him suddenly. His eyes had been fixed on my face. He had been watching me furtively. My heart beat suddenly faster. I drew a little breath, I could not trust myself to speak for a moment. After a brief pause he continued—

"I've been out there a good many years. Long enough to get jolly well sick of the place and

people and everything connected with it. I'm thankful to say that I've finished with it."

"You are not going back, then," I remarked, indifferently.

"Not I," he declared. "I only went to make money, and I've made it—a good deal. Now I'm going to enjoy it, here, in the old country. Marry and settle down, and all that sort of thing, you know, Miss Ffolliot."

His keen, black eyes were fixed upon my face. I felt a slight flush of colour in my cheeks. At that moment I hated Lady Naselton. She had been talking to this odious man about me, and he had been quick enough to understand her aright. I should have liked to have got up but for a certain reason. He had come from South America. He had arrived in London about the 15th. So I sat there and suffered.

"A most praiseworthy ambition," I remarked, with a sarcasm which I strove vainly to keep to myself. "I am sure I wish you every success."

"That is very good of you," he answered, slowly. "Wishes count for a good deal sometimes. I am very thankful for yours."

"Wishes cost little," I answered, coldly, "and I am afraid that mine are practically valueless. Have you been away from England long?"

"For many years," he answered, after a slight hesitation.

"It seems odd," I remarked, "that your first visit should be at the house of a comparative stranger. Have you no relations or old friends to welcome you back?"

A slight and peculiar smile hovered upon his lips.

"I have some old friends," he said, quietly; "I do not know whether they will welcome me home again. Soon I shall know. I am not far away from them."

"Do they know of your return?" I asked.

"Some of them. One of them I should say," he answered. "The one about whom I care does not know."

"You are going to surprise him?" I remarked.

"I am going to surprise her," he corrected.

There was a short silence. I had no more doubt in my mind. Chance had brought me face to face with the writer of that letter to my father, the man to find whom he was even now in London. Perhaps they had already met; I stole a glance at him; he was furtively watching me all the while.

"I have also," he said, "a sister of whom I am very fond. She lives in Paris. I have written to her to come to me—not here, of course, to London."

I turned a little in my chair and faced him.

"I wonder," I said, "if amongst those friends

of whom you speak there is any one whom I know."

His lips parted, and he showed all his glistening white teeth.

"Somehow," he said, softly, under his breath, "I thought you knew. Has your father sent you here? Have you any message for me? If so, let me have it, we may be disturbed."

I shook my head.

"My father is in London," I told him. "He left the morning he had your letter."

"When is he coming back?" he asked, eagerly.

"On Friday, I believe," I answered. "I am not quite sure. At any rate, he will be here by Sunday."

An odd look flashed for a moment across the man's face. It gave me an uneasy sensation.

"Have you seen him in London?" I asked, quickly.

"Certainly not," he answered; "I have seen no one. I have only been in England for a day or two. I shall look forward," he added, "to the pleasure of seeing your father on Sunday."

"And Mr. Bruce Deville?" I inquired.

He looked at me suspiciously. He was wondering how much I knew.

"Mr. Bruce Deville?" he said, slowly. "I have not seen him lately; they tell me he has altered a great deal."

"I have only known him a week, and so I cannot tell," I answered.

Again he fixed his little dark eyes upon me; he was evidently completely puzzled.

"You have only known him a week, and yet you know that—that he and I are not strangers?"

"I learned it by accident," I answered.

Obviously he did not believe me; he hesitated for a moment to put his disbelief into words, and in the meantime I made a bold stroke.

"Have you seen Adelaide Fortress yet?" I asked.

His face changed. He looked at me half in wonder, half eagerly; his whole expression had softened.

"Not yet," he said; "I am waiting to know where she is; I would go to her to-day—if only I dared—if only I dared!"

His dark eyes were lit with passion; a pale shade seemed to have crept in upon the sallowness of his cheeks.

"When you talk of her," he said, speaking rapidly, and with his voice thick with some manner of agitation, "you make me forget everything! You make me forget who you are, who she is, where we are! I remember only that she exists! Oh, my God!"

I laid my hand upon his coat sleeve.

"Be careful," I whispered. "People will notice you; speak lower."

His voice sank; it was still, however, hoarse with passion.

"I shall know soon," he said, "very soon, whether the years have made her any kinder; whether the dream, the wild dream of my life, is any nearer completion. Oh, you may start!" he added, looking into my white, puzzled face; "you and your father, and Deville, and the whole world may know it. I love her still! I am going to regain her or die! There! You see it is to be no secret war; go and tell your father if you like, tell them all, bid them prepare. If they stand in my way they must suffer. Soon I am going to her. I am going to stand before her and point to my grey hairs, and say, 'Every one of them is a thought of you; every day of my life has been moulded towards the winning of you.' And when I tell her that, and point to the past, she will be mine again."

"You are very sure of her," I murmured.

His face fell.

"Alas! no," he cried, "I cannot say that; only it is my hope and my passion which are so strong. They run away with me; I picture it to myself—this blessed thing—and I forget. Listen!" he added, with sudden emphasis, "you must promise me something. I have let my tongue go too fast.

I have talked to you as my other self; you must promise me one thing."

"What is it?" I asked.

"You must promise me that you will not speak of my presence here to her. In a day or two—well, we shall see. I shall go to her then; I shall risk everything. But at present, no! She must be ignorant of my return until I myself declare it. You will promise me this?"

I promised. I scarcely dared do otherwise if I wished to avoid a scene, for already the agitation and occasional excitement of his speech were attracting attention. But, having promised, I asked him a question.

"Will not Mr. Deville tell her—or my father?"

"It is just possible that Mr. Deville might," he said, with the air of one who had well considered the matter. "But I do not think it likely; there are certain reasons which would probably keep him silent."

"And my father?" I asked.

Again there was an odd look in his face. Somehow it filled me with vague alarm; I could not imagine what it meant.

"I do not think," he answered, "that your father will tell her; I am nearly sure that he will not. No, I myself shall announce my return. I shall stand face to face with her before she has learned to school her countenance. I shall see in the

light or in the darkness how she holds me. It will be a test—a glorious test."

Lady Naselton came rustling up to us with beaming face. "My dear girl," she said, "I am so sorry to disturb you, you both look so interested. Whatever you have found to talk about I can't imagine. Lady Romney is going; she would so like to know you. Would you mind coming to speak to her?"

"With pleasure," I declared, rising at once to my feet; "I must be going too. Good afternoon, Mr. Berdenstein."

He held out his hand, but I had no intention of shaking hands with him. I bowed coldly, and turned to follow Lady Naselton.

"Perhaps it is best," he murmured, leaning a little forward. "We cannot possibly be friends; no doubt you hate me; we are on opposite sides. Good afternoon, Miss Ffolliot."

I followed Lady Naselton, but before we had reached the Romneys I stopped her.

"Lady Naselton, who is that man?" I asked her. "What do you know of him?"

"My dear child," she answered, "from the confidential manner in which you have been talking all this time, I should have imagined that he had told you his history from childhood. Frankly, I don't know anything about him at all. He was very good to Fred in South America, and he

has made a lot of money, that is really all I know. Fred met him in town, and brought him down without notice. I hope," she added, looking at my pale face, "that he has been behaving himself properly."

"I have no fault to find with him," I answered. "I was curious, that is all."

"I am so glad, dear," she answered, smiling. "For a millionaire you know, I don't consider him at all unpresentable, do you?"

I smiled faintly. Poor Lady Naselton!

"He did not strike me as being remarkably objectionable," I answered. "He is a little awkward, and very confidential."

Lady Naselton piloted me across the room towards the Romneys, with her arm linked in mine.

"We must make a few allowances, my dear," she whispered, confidentially. "One cannot have everything nowadays. He is really not so bad, and the money is quite safe. In diamonds, or something, Fred says. It is quite a million."

I glanced back to him as I stood talking with the Romneys. He was sitting quietly where I had left him, watching me covertly. His black eyebrows were drawn together, and a certain look of anxiety seemed to have sharpened his sallow features. His eyes fell at once before mine. I felt that I would have given everything I possessed in the world to have known who he was.

CHAPTER VII

A FRUITLESS APPEAL

FRIDAY passed without any sign of my father's return, and when on Saturday morning we found no letter from him upon the breakfast table, the vague disquiet of the day before assumed a definite shape. We looked into one another's faces, and we were seriously alarmed.

"We shall be sure to hear from him in an hour or two," Alice said, holding her cup to her lips with shaking hands. "He must have missed the post. We shall have a telegram."

"I hope so," I answered, fervently. "Nothing can have happened to him, of course. It is absurd to feel nervous. But it is too bad of him. He ought to have written. However busy he is, he could have found a minute or two."

"I will never let him go away again without leaving us an address of some sort," Alice declared. "No doubt he will telegraph soon. Still, one cannot help feeling uneasy."

But no telegram arrived. Luncheon time came and passed without a word. The afternoon dragged on. The last train from London was due at the nearest railway station—three miles away—at six o'clock. At eight o'clock he had not returned. More than an hour ago a fly with luggage from the train had passed our gate and gone on to the Yellow House. Alice was as white as a sheet, and commenced to cry softly to herself.

"There is a service to-morrow morning, and no one to help," she moaned. "He must be very ill. What had we better do, Kate?"

Do! How was I to know? Action of any sort would have been a relief, but it was like groping in the dark. He had left no address to which we could write, and, so far as we knew, he did not belong to any club nor had he any friends in London. There was no means of tracing him, not a clue as to the nature of the business which had called him so suddenly to town. Even granting that he had gone to see Mr. Berdenstein, to meet him on his arrival in London, it was hopeless to try and imagine where he might be prosecuting his search. Mr. Berdenstein had denied that he had met him. Without a doubt he would deny it again if I went to him. As he had told me plainly that we were on opposite sides, to look for help from him was utterly futile.

We girls were helpless. Alice, whose instincts were largely conventional, was feeling chiefly the scandal which must accrue when his place in the pulpit to-morrow remained empty and service had to be abandoned. For my part, my anxieties were deeper. Chance had placed in my hands the threads of a mystery whose unravelment was threatened with terrible possibilities. I could not tell what the end of it might be. I scarcely dared to let my mind dwell upon it at all. I concentrated my thoughts upon the present dilemma. The first thing to be done was to find my father. There was only one possible shadow of a clue as to his whereabouts. One man knew the secret of that letter which had called him up to London. To that man I resolved that I would go.

But as dusk came on, and I was preparing to start for the Court, I saw his tall figure crossing the park towards the Yellow House. I did not hesitate then any more. To see him there would be easier than to confront him alone at the Court. I threw a cloak over my shoulders and went bare-headed down the drive. The thing which I was proposing to myself to do was simple enough in effect, although with my overwrought nerves it presented itself to me at the time as a somewhat formidable undertaking. I was going to confront them together. I was going to pray for their help.

I walked swiftly across the park and through

the plantation to the Yellow House, and after pausing for a moment to regain my breath, I rang the bell. There was no immediate answer, and save that I could see through a chink in the drawn curtains a rose-shaded lamp burning in the drawing-room, I should have feared that after all Adelaide Fortress had not returned. But in a few minutes the trim little maid-servant opened the door, letting out a flood of light. She started with surprise to see me standing there, looking no doubt a little ghost-like with my white, anxious face and uncovered head.

"I want to speak to Mrs. Fortress," I said. "Is she in?"

The girl hesitated, but I took her assent for granted, and stepped into the hall. She moved towards the drawing-room door. I kept close by her side, and when she opened it I crossed the threshold.

Bruce Deville was there, sitting in a low chair. To my surprise he was wearing evening dress, and he had a book in his hand, from which he appeared to have been reading aloud. At my entrance he rose to his feet at once with a little exclamation of surprise. Adelaide Fortress, whose back had been turned to the door, turned sharply round. She too rose to her feet. A swift look passed between them, which did not escape me.

"Miss Ffolliot!" she exclaimed. "Why, is

anything the matter?" The little maid had retreated, and closed the door. I advanced a few steps further into the room. Somehow I became dimly conscious that their attitude towards me, or my mission, if they had surmised its purport, was in a certain sense hostile. I looked into the woman's eyes, and I was perplexed. Something had come between us. Perhaps it was my father's stern words to her, perhaps it was some shadow from those former days concerning which they certainly had some common knowledge. But from whatever cause it arose there was certainly a change. The frank sympathy which seemed to have sprung up between us on that delightful afternoon was altogether a thing of the past, almost as though it had never been. She faced me coldly, with indrawn lips and unfriendly face. I was confused and perplexed; yet even in that same moment a thought flashed in upon me. She was wearing a mask. For some reason or other she was putting away her friendliness. Surely it was the memory of my father's words.

"It was Mr. Deville I wanted to see," I said. "I saw him cross the park on his way here, so I followed. I am in trouble. I wanted to ask him a question."

He stood leaning against the broad mantelpiece, his brows contracted, his face cold and forbidding.

"I am afraid that I cannot help you, Miss Ffolliot," he said. "I cannot conceive any way in which I could be of service to you, I am afraid."

"You can help me if you will, by answering a single question," I interrupted. "You dropped a letter from your pocket on Wednesday morning, and I returned it to you. Tell me whose handwriting it was!"

There was a little crash upon the floor, and the sound of a half-uttered exclamation. Adelaide Fortress had dropped a small china ornament with which she had been playing. She did not even glance towards the pieces at her feet. She was bending slightly towards me, her lips half parted, her cheeks pale. Her appearance fascinated me; I forgot Mr. Deville altogether until the sound of his clear, deep voice broke the silence.

"I had several letters in my pocket, Miss Ffolliot," he said, slowly. "I am not sure that I remember which one it was that you were good enough to restore to me. In any case, how are you interested in the writer of any of them? What has it to do with your present trouble—whatever that may be?"

"I will tell you," I answered, readily. "On Tuesday morning my father received a letter, and whatever its contents were, they summoned

him to London. He was to have returned yesterday. He did not come, and he sent no message. All to-day we have had no word from him. The last train from London to-night is in, and he has not come. We do not know where he is, or what has become of him. There are the services to-morrow, and no one to take them. He must be ill, or in trouble of some sort, or he would have returned, that is certain. It has made us terribly anxious."

"I am very sorry to hear this, Miss Ffolliot," he said. "If I could help you I would be glad, but I am afraid I do not quite see—exactly——"

I raised my eyes to his and looked him in the face. The words seemed to die away upon his lips. He was not actor enough for his part.

"I will tell you why I came to you for help, Mr. Deville," I exclaimed. "The handwriting upon the letter which you dropped was the same handwriting which summoned my father to London."

Then, for the first time, some glimmering of the mystery in which these persons and my father were alike concerned dawned upon me. The man and the women looked at one another; Bruce Deville walked over to the window without answering or addressing me. I had, indeed, asked no direct question. Yet they knew what I wanted. It was the whole truth which I desired.

I stamped my foot upon the floor. Did they know what my sufferings were, those two persons, with their pale, puzzled faces and cold words? I felt myself growing angry.

"Answer me!" I cried. "Who wrote you that letter?"

Still neither the man or the woman spoke. Their silence maddened me. I forgot my promise to the man at Naselton Hall. I forgot everything except my desire to sting them out of that merciless, unsympathetic silence. So I cried out to them—

"I will tell you who wrote it; it was a man from South America, and his name is Berdenstein. He is at Naselton Hall. I will go to him. Perhaps he will tell me what you will not."

The man stepped forward with outstretched hand. His face was dark with passionate anger, almost I thought he would have struck me. But the woman's was pale as death, and a drop of red blood marked the place where her teeth met her under lip. Then I saw that the man had known, but the woman had not.

"If you know so much," he said, brutally, "you had better go to him and discover the rest. You will find him very sympathetic. Without a doubt he will help you!"

"No! No!"

The woman's negative rang out with a sudden

sharp and crisp distinctness. She rose and came over to my side. She laid her hands softly upon my shoulders. Her face amazed me, it was so full of sympathy, and yet so sorrowful. She, too, had received a blow.

"Child," she said, softly, "you must not be impatient. I believe that your father is well. I believe that somehow or other he will contrive to be here in time to take up his duties to-morrow. We could not tell you—either Mr. Deville or I—where he is, but we know perhaps a little more than you do. He is in London somewhere seeking for that person whom you have just mentioned. He will not find him, but he will not give up searching for him till the last moment. But, child, whatever you do, avoid that man Berdenstein like a pestilence. Your father and he are bitter and terrible enemies. Do not dream of going to him. Do not let your father know that he is near. If fate must have it so, they will meet. But God forbid!—but God forbid!"

"Who is he, then, this man, this Berdenstein?" I asked her under my breath. Her words had had a powerful effect upon me. She was terribly in earnest. I knew that she was speaking for my good. I trusted her. I could not help it.

She shook her head. Her eyes were full of horror.

"It is not for me to tell you, child. It is one of those things which God forbid that you may ever know."

Then there was a silence between us. After all this mystery whose shadows seemed to surround me was like a far away thing. My present trouble weighed heaviest upon me. The other was vague, even though it was terrible. My father's disappearance was a real and terrible calamity staring me in the face. It engrossed all my thoughts. They would tell me nothing, those two. I dared not go to Berdenstein. Already I was afraid of him. I remembered his smile when I spoke of my father, and I shuddered. Supposing they had met. Supposing they had come together face to face in some lonely house. Perhaps his letter had been a decoy. The man's face, with its cruel mouth and sardonic smile, suddenly loomed large in my memory. I sprang to my feet with a cry of fear. I was terrified with my own thoughts. Bruce Deville came over to me, and I found him studying my face with a new expression, the meaning of which I could not fathom.

"If you will come to the window, Miss Ffolliot," he said, "I think you will see something which will relieve some part of your anxiety at any rate."

I hastened eagerly to his side. Only a few

yards away, walking steadily in the middle of the hard, white road, was a figure in sombre black. His shoulders were bent, and his pale face downcast. His whole appearance was that of a weary and dejected wanderer. These things I realised more completely afterwards; for the present a sense of almost intolerable relief drowned every other motion. It was my father —he had returned.

I should have rushed out to him, but Bruce Deville laid his hand very softly upon my shoulder. I could not have believed that any touch of his could be so gentle.

"I wish you would take my advice, Miss Ffolliot," he said. "Take the path through the plantation home, and don't let your father see you leaving here. It would be better, would it not, Adelaide?" he added.

She looked at me.

"Yes, it would be better," she said. "Do you mind? You will be at home as soon as he is."

I could not but admit that the advice was good, bearing in mind my father's words when he found me there only a few days before. Yet it galled me that it should have been offered. What was this secret shared between these three of which I was ignorant? I declared to myself that I would know as soon as my father and I were alone together. I would insist upon all these

things being made clear to me. I would bear it no longer, I was resolved on that. But in the meantime I was helpless.

"Very well," I answered; "perhaps you are right, I will go by the footpath."

I left the room abruptly. Mr. Deville opened the front door for me, and hesitated with his cap in his hand. I waved him away.

"I will go alone," I said. "It is quite light."

"As you will," he answered, shortly. "Good-night."

He turned on his heel and re-entered the room. I crossed the road with soft footsteps. At the opening of the plantation I paused. My father was in the road below, walking wearily and leaning upon his stick. At my sudden standstill a twig beneath my feet snapped short. A sudden change seemed to transform his face. He stopped short and turned round with the swift, eager movement of a young man. His hand fumbled for a moment in the pocket of his long clerical coat, and reappeared clutching something which flashed like steel in the dull light. He held it at arm's length, looking eagerly around, peering forward in my direction, but unable to see me owing to the dark shadows of the trees beneath which I stood. But I on the other hand could see his every movement; in the half-light his figure stood out in such marvellous distinctness

against the white road and the low, grey line of sky beyond. I could see him, and I could see what it was he carried in his hand. It was a small, shining revolver.

He stood quite still like a man expecting a sudden attack. When none came and the stillness remained unbroken, the strained, eager light died slowly out of his face. He appeared rather disappointed than relieved. Reluctantly he turned around, and with the revolver still in his hand but hidden beneath the skirts of his coat, made his way up the white hill towards the Vicarage. He must have walked quickly, for although I hurried, and my way back was the shorter, he was already at our gate when I emerged from the plantation. As he stooped to adjust the fastening I heard him groan, and bending forward I caught a glimpse of his face. I must have cried out, only my lips seemed palsied as though I were but a sleeping figure in some terrible nightmare. His face was like the face of a dead man. He seemed to have aged by at least a dozen years. As he hastened up the little drive, his walk, usually so dignified and elastic, became a shamble. It seemed to me that this was but the wreck of the man who had left us only a few days before.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COMING OF MR. BERDENSTEIN

THERE are days marked in our lives with white stones. We can never forget them. Recollections, a very easy effort of memory, seem to bring back even in some measure the very thrill, the same pulsations and emotions, as were kindled into life by certain never-to-be-forgotten happenings. Time cannot weaken them. Whilst we have life the memory of them is eternal. And there are other days against the memory of which we have dropped a black stone. We shrink from anything which may recall them. No sacrifice would seem too great if only we could set the seal of oblivion upon those few hated hours. We school ourselves to close our eyes, and turn our heads away from anything which might in any manner recall them to us. Yet we are powerless. Ghosts of them steal light-footed, detested and uninvited guests, across our fairest moments; the chill of winter shakes us on the most brilliant of midsummer days; the colour

steals from our cheeks, and our blood runs to water. We are at the mercy of those touches of icy reminiscence. There is no escape from them. There never will be any escape. The Sunday which followed my father's visit to London is one of those hideous memories. In the calendar of my life it is marked with the blackest of black stones. I only pray that such another day as that may never find its way into my life.

The morning passed much as usual. My father had scarcely spoken to us on the previous evening. In reply to our half eager, half frightened questions, he admitted that he had been ill. He would not hear of a doctor. His malady, he told us, was one which he himself perfectly understood. He would be better in a few days. He ate and drank sparingly, and then retired at once to his room. We heard him drag himself wearily up the stairs, and Alice burst into tears, and I myself felt a lump in my throat. Yet what could we do? He would not have us near him. The only invalid's privilege which he permitted himself was a fire in his bedroom, and this he asked for immediately he entered the house, although the night was close and oppressive, and he had come in with beads of perspiration standing out upon his white forehead.

In the morning he preached an old sermon, preached it with weary lips and wholly nonchalant manner. His pallid face and lustreless

eyes became objects of remark amongst the meagre congregation. I could hear people whispering to one another when the service was over. Lady Naselton spoke to me of it with concern as we passed down the aisle.

"I am sorry to see your father looking so dreadfully ill, dear," she remarked. "I am particularly sorry to-day. Come outside, and I will tell you why."

We passed out together into the sunlit air, fresh and vigorous after the dull, vault-like gloom of the little church, with its ivy-hung windows. Lady Naselton held my arm.

"My dear," she said, "the Bishop is lunching with us to-day, and staying all night. I have spoken to him about your father. He remembers him quite well, and he is coming to service this evening on purpose to hear him preach."

"The Bishop," I repeated, vaguely. "Do you mean our Bishop? The Bishop of Exchester?"

"Yea. I am not supposed, of course, to say anything about it, as his visit has nothing whatever to do with diocesan affairs, but I should be so disappointed if your father did not make an impression upon him."

She looked around to be sure that no one was listening. It was quite a needless precaution.

"You see, dear, I happen to know that there are two vacant stalls at the cathedral, and the

Bishop wants a preacher badly. It is owing to what I have told him about your father that he is coming over to-day. I do hope that he will be at his best this evening."

"I am afraid that there is very little chance of it," I answered, blankly. "He is really very ill. He will not admit it, but you can see for yourself."

"He must make an effort," Lady Naselton said, firmly. "Will you tell him this from me? Say that we shall all be there, and if only he can make a good impression—well, it is the chance of a lifetime. Of course, we shall all be terribly sorry to lose you, but Exchester is not very far off, and we really could not expect to keep a man with your father's gifts very long. Try and rouse him up, won't you? Goodbye, dear."

She drove off, and I waited at the vestry door for my father. He came out with half-closed eyes, and seemed scarcely to see me. I walked by his side, and repeated what Lady Naselton had told me. Contrary to my expectations, the news was sufficient to rouse him from his apathy.

"The Bishop here to-night!" he repeated, thoughtfully. "You are quite sure that there is no mistake? It is the Bishop of Exchester?"

I nodded assent.

"So Lady Naselton assured me. I have heard her say more than once that they knew him very

well indeed. She is most anxious that you should do your very best. It seems that there are two stalls vacant at the cathedral."

The light flashed into his eyes for a moment, and then died out.

"If only it had been a week ago," he said. "I have other things in my mind now. I am not in the mood to prepare anything worth listening to."

"Those other things, father," I said, softly. "Are we to remain wholly ignorant of them? If there is any trouble to be faced, we are ready to take our share."

He shook his head, and a wan smile flickered for a moment upon his pale lips. He looked at me not unkindly.

"It may come, Kate," he said, softly. "Till then, be patient and ask no questions."

We had reached the house, and I said no more. Directly after luncheon, at which he ate scarcely anything, he went into his study. We hoped, Alice and I, that he had gone to work. But in less than half an hour he came out. I met him in the hall.

"My hat and stick, Kate," he said. "I am going for a walk."

His manner forbade questions, but as he was leaving the house an impulse came to me.

"May I come with you, father?" I asked. "I was going for a walk too."

He hesitated for a moment, and seemed about to refuse. What made him change his mind I could never tell. But he did change it.

"Yes, you can come," he said, shortly. "I am starting now, though. I cannot wait for a moment."

"I am quite ready," I answered, taking my hat and gloves from the stand. So we passed out of the house together.

At the gate he paused for a moment, and I thought that he was going to take the road which led to the Yellow House and Deville Court. Apparently he changed his mind, however.

"We will take the footpath to Bromilow Downs," he said. "I have never been there."

We turned our backs upon the more familiar places, and walked slowly along the country which led to the Downs. We neither of us spoke a word for some time. Once or twice I glanced towards him with concern. He was moving with uncertain steps, and every now and then he pressed his hand to his side. Physically, I could see that he was scarcely equal to the exertion of walking. It was mental disquiet which had brought him out. His eyes were dry and bright, and there was a hectic flush upon his cheeks. As we passed from the lane out on to the open Downs, he drew a little breath and removed his hat. The autumn wind swept through his hair, and blew open his

coat. He took in a long breath of it. "This is good," he said, softly. "Let us rest here."

We sat upon the trunk of a fallen pine tree on the verge of the common. Far away on the hillside rose the red chimneys of Naselton Hall. I looked at them, and of a sudden the desire to tell my father what I knew of that man's presence there grew stronger and stronger. After all it was his right to know. It was best to tell him.

"Father," I said, "I have something to say to you. It is something which I think you ought to know."

He looked away from vacancy into my face. Something in my manner seemed to attract him. He frowned, and answered me sharply.

"What is it, child? Only mind that it is not a question."

"It is not a question," I said. "It is something that I want to tell you. Perhaps I ought to have told you before. One afternoon last week I was at Lady Naselton's for tea. I met a man there—half a foreigner he seemed to me. He had lately returned from South America. His name was Berdenstein."

He heard me in perfect silence. He did not utter a single exclamation. Only I saw his head sink, and a curious marble rigidity settle down upon his features, chasing away all expression. In the silence which followed before I spoke

again I could hear his breathing sharp and low, almost like the panting of an animal in pain.

"Don't think that I have been spying on you, father," I begged. "It all came about so naturally. I gave you your letters the morning that you went away, and I could not help seeing that one of them was from South America. On the envelope was written: 'In London about the 15th.' Well, as you left for London at once, I considered that you went to meet that person, whoever it was. Then at Lady Naselton's this man stared at me so, and he told me that he came from South America. Some instinct seemed to suggest to me that this was the man who had written that letter. I talked to him for awhile, and I was sure of it."

Then my father spoke. He was like a man who had received a stroke. His voice seemed to come from a great distance. His eyes were fixed upon that break in the trees on the distant hillside beyond which was Naselton Hall.

"So near," he said, softly—"so very near! How did he come here? Was it chance?"

"He was good to Lady Naselton's son abroad," I answered. "He is very rich, they say."

"Ay, ay!" My father nodded his head slowly. His manner was becoming more natural. Yet there was a look of deadly earnest in his white, set face. To look at him made me almost shudder.

Something in his expression was like a premonition of the tragedy to come.

"We shall meet soon, then," he said, thoughtfully. "It may be to-morrow. It may be to-day. Kate, your eyes are younger than mine. Is that a man coming along the road there?—down in the hollow on the other side of the turn. Do you see?"

I stood up by his side. There was a figure in sight, but as yet a long way off.

"It is a man," I said. "He is coming towards us."

We stood there side by side for several minutes. My father was leaning upon my shoulder. The clutch of his fingers seemed to burn their way through my dress into my flesh. It was as though they were tipped with fire. He did not move or speak. He kept his eyes steadfastly fixed upon the bend of the road. Suddenly a slight change flashed into his face. He leaned forward; his upper lip quivered; he shaded his eyes with his hand. I followed his rapt gaze, and on the middle of the dusty white road I could see the man now. Well within sight, I watched him draw nearer and near. His carriage was buoyant and un-English, and he carried a cane, with which he snapped off the heads of the thistles growing by the hedge-side. He seemed to be whistling softly to himself, showing all the while

those rows of white, glistening teeth unpleasantly prominent against the yellowish tinge of his cheeks. From the first I had scarcely doubted that this was the man of whom we had been talking. The coincidence of his coming never even struck me. It seemed at the time to be a perfectly natural thing.

He came to within a yard or two of us before he appeared to recognise me. Then he took off his hat and made me a sweeping bow. In the middle of it he encountered my father's steady gaze. His hat slipped from his fingers—he stood like a man turned to stone. His black eyes were full of horror; he looked at my father as a man would look at one risen from the dead. And my father returned his gaze with a faint, curious smile parting his thin lips.

"Welcome to England once more, Stephen," my father said, grimly. "You were about to address my daughter. Have you lost your way?"

The man opened his lips twice before he spoke. I could almost fancy that his teeth were chattering. His voice was very low and husky.

"I was going to ask the way to Deville Court," he said. All the time his eyes never left my father's face. For some reason or other they were full of wonder; my father's presence seemed to terrify him.

"The way to Deville Court?" my father repeated. "I am returning in that direction. I will show it to you myself. There are several turns before you get on to the straight road."

My father descended the bank into the road. The stranger muttered something inaudible, which my father ignored.

"We had better start," he said, calmly. "It is rather a long way."

The man whom my father had called Stephen hesitated and drew back.

"The young lady," he suggested, faintly—"she will come with us."

"The young lady has an engagement in another direction," he said, with his eyes fixed on me. "I want you, Kate, to call upon Mr. Charlsworth and tell him to be sure to be at church to-night. You can tell him why it is important."

There was a ring in my father's tone, and a light in the glance which he flashed upon me which forbade any idea of remonstrance. Yet at the thought of leaving those two men together a cold chill seemed to pass through all my veins. Something seemed to tell me that this was no ordinary meeting. The man Berdenstein's look of terror as he had recognised my father was unmistakable. Even now he was afraid to go with him. Yet I was powerless, I dared not disobey. Already the two men were walking side

by side. I was left alone, and the farmhouse to which my father had bidden me go lay in altogether a different direction. I stood and watched them pass along the lane together. Then I went on my errand. There was nothing else I could do.

* * * * *

I reached home in about an hour. Alice met me at the door.

"Has father come in yet?" I asked her, quickly.

She nodded.

"About five minutes ago. The walk seemed to have done him good," she added. "He was quite cheerful, and had a wonderful colour. Why, Kate! what have you been doing to yourself? You are as white as a ghost."

"He was alone, I suppose?" I asked, ignoring the question.

"Alone! Of course he was alone. Come in and have some tea at once. You look tired out."

CHAPTER IX

A TERRIBLE INTERRUPTION

BY some means or other the news had spread in the village, and such a congregation as I had never seen filled our little church long before the usual time. In a dark corner I saw, to my surprise, Bruce Deville leaning against a pillar with folded arms, and on my way to my pew I passed Adelaide Fortress seated in a chair in the nave. Neither of these two had I ever seen in church before, and what had brought them there on that particular evening I never clearly understood. It was a little irony of fate—one of those impulses which it is hard to believe are altogether coincidences.

The Bishop came early, and sat by Lady Naselton's side, the centre of all eyes. I looked away from him to the chancel. I was strangely nervous. It was still dimly lit, although the bells had ceased to ring. There was only a moment's pause, however, then the little space was filled with white-robed figures, and my sister's volun-

tary, unduly prolonged in this instance, died away in a few soft chords. I drew a long breath of relief. Everything was going as usual. Perhaps, after all this night might be a fateful one to us.

I watched the Bishop's face from the first. I saw him glance up as if in surprise at my father's rich, musical voice, which woke the echoes of the dark little church with the first words of the service. At the singing, which was always wretched, he frowned, and, catching a sideway glance from Lady Naselton, smiled somewhat. Studying him through half-closed eyelids, I decided that country services in the abstract did not attract him, and that he was a little bored.

It was only when my father stood up in the pulpit and looked around him in that moment or two of hushed suspense which precedes the giving out of the text, that the lines of his face relaxed, and he settled himself down with an air of interest.

For me it was a terribly anxious moment. I knew my father's state of health, and I remembered the few weary and pointless words which had gone to make his morning sermon. Contrary to his usual custom, he stood there without any notes of any sort. I scarcely dared to hope that he would be able to do himself justice. Yet the first words of his text had scarcely left his lips when

some premonition of what was to come sent a strange thrill through all my nerves. "The wages of sin is death." No words could give any idea of the marvellous yet altogether effortless solemnity with which these words passed from my father's lips. Scarcely uttered above a whisper, they yet penetrated to the utmost corners of the little church. Was it really intense earnestness or a wonderful knowledge and appreciation of true dramatic effect which made him close the book with a slow movement of his forefinger, and stand up there amongst the deep shadows as pale as the surplice which hung around his pale form? Yet when he spoke his voice did not tremble or falter. His words, tense with life, all vibrating with hidden fire, penetrated easily to the furthest and darkest corner of the building.

"The wages of sin—the eternal torment of a conscience never sleeping, never weary!" It was of that he went on to speak. I can scarcely remember so much as a single sentence of that sermon, although its effect upon myself and those who formed the congregation of listeners, is a memory which even now thrills me. From those few opening words, pregnant as they were with dramatic force, and lit with the fire of true eloquence, not for one moment did the attention of the little congregation wander. A leaf could have been heard to drop in the church, the rustle

of a pocket-handkerchief was a perfectly audible sound. Not even a child looked sideways to watch the dark ivy waving softly against the stained-glass windows or wondered at the strange pattern which a ray of dying sunlight had traced upon the bare stone aisles. There was something personal—something like the cry of human sorrow itself in that slow, passionate outpouring. Was it by any chance a confession or an accusation to which we were listening? It was on the universality of sin of which my father spoke with such heart-moving emphasis. Our lives were like cupboards having many chambers, some of which were open indeed to the daylight and the gaze of all men, but there were others jealously closed and locked. We could make their outside beautiful, we could keep the eyes of all men from penetrating beneath that fair exterior. We could lock them with a cunning and secret key, so that no hand save our own could lay bare the grisly spectre that lurked within. Yet our own knowledge, or what we had grown to call conscience, sat in our hearts and mocked us. Sometime the great white light swept into the hidden places, there was a tug at our heartstrings, and behold the seal had fallen away. And in that church, my father added slowly, "he doubted whether any one could say that within him those dark places were not."

Suddenly his calm, tense eloquence became

touched with passion. His pale face gleamed, and his eyes were lit with an inward fire. Gesture and tone moved to the beat of a deeper and more subtle rhetoric. He was pleading for those whose sin beat about in their bosoms and lay like a dark shadow across all the sweet places of life. Passionate and more passionate he grew. He was pleading—for whom ? We listened entranced. His terrible earnestness passed like an electric thrill into the hearts of all of us. Several women were crying softly ; men sat there with bowed heads, face to face with ghosts long since buried. Bruce Deville was sitting back in his corner with folded arms and downcast head. Adelaide Fortress was looking steadfastly up towards that pale, inspired figure, with soft, wet eyes. Even the Bishop was deeply moved, and was listening to every word. For my part there was a great lump in my throat. The sense of some terrible reality behind my father's impassioned words had left me pale and trembling. A subtle sense of excitement stole through the church. When he paused for a moment before his concluding sentence, there was something almost like a murmur amongst the congregation, followed by another period of breathless suspense.

In the midst of that deep hush a faint sound attracted me. My seat was on a level with the open door, and I glanced out. A man was lean-

ing against the porch—a man in very grievous condition. His clothes were disordered and torn, and there was a great stain on the front of his coat. I alone had gazed away from the preacher in the pulpit towards him, and whilst I looked the sound which had first attracted me was repeated. A low, faint moan, scarcely louder than a whisper, passed from between his lips. He stood there supporting himself with his hands against the wall. His lined face was turned towards me, and, with a thrill of horror, I recognised him. I half-rose from my seat. The man was either ill or dying. He seemed to be making frantic signs to me. I tried my utmost to signal to Mr. Charlsworth, but, like all the rest, his eyes seemed riveted upon the pulpit. Before I could leave my seat, or attract any one's attention, he had staggered through the door into the church itself. He stood leaning upon a vacant chair, a wild, disordered object, with blood stains upon his hands and clothes, and his dark eyes red and gleaming fiercely beneath his wind-tossed mass of black hair.

So fascinated was the congregation that save myself only one or two stray people had noticed him. He stood amongst the shadows, and only I, to whom his profile appeared against the background of the open door, was able to mark the full and terrible disorder of his person. And

while I waited, numb with some nameless fear, the preacher's voice rang once more through the building, and men and women bowed their heads before the sweet, lingering passion of those sad words.

"The wages of sin is death. For all things may pass away save sin. Sin alone is eternal. Sin alone must stamp itself wherever it touches with an undying and everlasting mark. Retribution is like the tides of the sea, which no man's hand can stay; and Death rides his barque upon the rolling waves. You and I and every man and woman in this world whom sin has known—alas! that there should be so many—have looked into his marble face, have felt the touch of his pitiless hands, and the cold despair of his unloving embrace. For there is Death spiritual and Death physical, and many of us who bear no traces of our past in the present of to-day, have fought our grim battle with the death—the—death——"

And then my father's words died away upon his lips, and the whole congregation knew what had already thrown me into an agony of terror. The man had staggered to the bottom of the aisle, and the sound of his shuffling movements, and the deep groan which accompanied them, had drawn many eyes towards him. His awful plight stood revealed with pitiless distinctness in the open space where he was now standing. The

red blood dripped from his clothing upon the bare stone floor, a foam which was like the foam of death frothed at his lips. He stood there, the focus of all horrified eyes, swaying to and fro as though on the eve of collapse, his arms outstretched, and his eyes flashing red fire upon the thin almost spectral-like figure of the preacher now leaning over towards him from the pulpit. The slight colour forced into my father's cheeks by the physical effort of his impassioned oratory died away. To his very lips he was white as the surplice he wore. Yet he did not lose his nerve or falter for a moment. He motioned to Mr. Charlsworth and the other churchwardens, and both left their places and hurried down the aisle towards the wild, tragical-looking figure. Just as they reached him the cry which his lips had twice declined to utter burst out upon the tense, breathless silence. He made a convulsive movement forward as though to spring like a wild cat upon that calm, dignified figure looking down upon him with unfaltering and unflinching gaze.

"Judas! you, Judas! Oh! my God!"

His hands, thrown wildly out, fell to his side. He sank back into the arms of one of those who had hurried from their places at my father's gesture. A last cry, more awful than anything I have ever heard, woke hideous echoes amongst the wormeaten, black oak beams, and before it

had died away, I saw Adelaide Fortress glide like a black wraith from her seat and fall on her knees by the fainting man's side. My father lifted up his arms, and with a deep, solemn tremor in his tone pronounced the Benediction. Then, with his surplice flying round him, he came swiftly down the aisle between the little crowd of horrified people. They all fell back at his approach. He sank on one knee by the side of the prostrate man and looked steadfastly into his face. The congregation all waited in their places, and Alice, who was only partly aware of what was going on, commenced to play a soft voluntary.

There was some whispering for a moment or two, then they lifted him up and carried the lifeless body out into the open air.

My father followed close behind. For a few minutes there was an uneasy silence. People forgot that the Benediction had been pronounced, and were uncertain whether to go or stay. Then some one made a start, and one by one they got up and left the church.

Lady Naselton paused and sat by my side for a moment. She was trembling all over.

"Do you know who it was?" she whispered.

I shook my head.

"I am not sure. It was a stranger; was it not?"

She shuddered.

"It was either a stranger, or my guest, Mr. Berdenstein. I only caught a glimpse of his face for a moment, and I could not be sure. He looked so horrible."

She paused, and suddenly discovered that I was half fainting. "Come out into the air," she whispered. I got up and went out with her just in time.

They had carried him into a distant corner of the churchyard. My father, when he saw us standing together in a little group, came slowly over as though to check our further advance. His face was haggard and drawn. He seemed to walk with difficulty, and underneath his surplice I could see that one hand was pressed to his side.

"The man is dead," he said, quietly. "There must have been an accident or a fight. No one seems to know where he came from."

"I wonder," remarked the Bishop, thoughtfully, "why he should have dragged himself up to the church in such a plight. One of those cottages or the Vicarage would have been nearer.

"Perhaps," my father answered, gravely, "he was struggling for sanctuary."

And the Bishop held up his right hand towards the sky with a solemn gesture.

"God grant that he may have found it," he prayed.

CHAPTER X

CANON OF BELCHESTER

THERE followed for me after these solemn words of the Bishop a phantasmagoria of human faces, and sky, and tree-tops, and a singing in my ears, now loud, now soft, in which all other sounds and movements seemed blended. I have an indistinct recollection of the walk home, and of finding myself in my own room. Then memory gradually faded away from me. Blank unconsciousness enveloped me like a cloud. The next thing I remember is waking up one morning as though after a terrible dream, a night of nightmares, and finding the room half full of medicine bottles. I looked around me faintly curious, inexpressibly bewildered; I suddenly realised that I had been ill.

I was not alone. Alice was standing over me, her round, honest little face beaming with pleasure and her underlip quivering.

"You are better," she said, softly. "I am so glad."

"How long have I been here?" I asked.

She sat down by my side.

"A week to-morrow! Just think of it."

I closed my eyes. The little scene in the churchyard had suddenly risen up again before my eyes. My head commenced to swim. I asked no more questions.

The next morning I was stronger. I sat up in bed and looked around. The first thing which I noticed was that the room was full of the most beautiful flowers; I stooped over a vase of roses and smelt them. The air was almost faint with their delicious perfume.

"Where did they all come from?" I asked Alice.

She laughed in rather an odd manner.

"From whom do you suppose?" she asked.

"How should I know?" I protested, faintly. "I have not an idea."

"From your *bête noir*," she exclaimed, plucking off one of the yellow blossoms and placing it upon my pillow.

I still looked blankly at her. She laughed.

"Can't you really guess?" she asked.

I shook my head. I really had no idea.

"From Mr. Deville. He has called nearly every day to ask after you."

It was surprising enough, but I said very little. I suppose I was not considered strong enough

then to hear any news of importance; but several days later, when I was sitting up, Alice looked up from the book she was reading aloud to me and told me something which I know she must have had very hard work to have kept to herself for so long.

"Father is to be made a canon, Kate," she said, triumphantly. I looked up at her bewildered. I had forgotten all about Lady Naselton's plans on his behalf. The latter part of this terrible Sunday had haunted me like a nightmare, usurping all my thoughts. There had been little room for other memories.

"A canon!" I repeated, feebly. "Do you mean it, Alice?"

She nodded.

"The Bishop came here from Lady Naselton's. He said a lot of nice things to father about his sermon on—that Sunday night—you remember."

"It was a wonderful sermon," I whispered.

"So the Bishop thinks; so every one thinks," Alice declared, with enthusiasm. "I shall never forget how I felt. And he had no notes, or anything."

"It was the most realistic sermon I ever heard," I said, with a little shudder. "It was like a scene from a play. It was wonderful."

Alice looked up at me quickly. Doubtless my

voice had betrayed some agitation. She laid her hand upon my arm.

"Don't think about it this evening," she begged. "I quite forgot father especially forbade my speaking of it to you. It must have been terrible for you to have been so near it all. I can't imagine what I should have done. I could see nothing from the organ screen, you know."

I leaned over and looked at her.

"Alice, I do not want to talk about it, but I want to know how it ended. You must tell me that."

She hesitated for a moment.

"He was quite dead," she said, slowly. "There was an inquest, and they decided that he must have been attacked somewhere in the wood between the downs and Yellow House. There were all the marks of a struggle within a few hundred yards of the road."

"Did they bring in a verdict of murder?" I asked.

Alice nodded.

"Yes," she assented, gravely. "He was murdered. It seems that he was lately come from abroad. He had been staying at Lady Naselton's, but she knew scarcely anything about him. He was kind to her son abroad. I think they just knew his name and that was all. They had no idea where to send to or if he had any near relatives alive. It was all very odd."

"Was he robbed?" I asked.

"No. His watch and money were found in his pocket undisturbed. If anything was taken from it it must have been papers only. The police are trying hard to find a clue, but they say that it is a very difficult case. No one seems to have seen him at all after he left Naselton Hall.

I caught at the side of my chair.

"No one at all?" I asked.

"Not a soul."

I was silent for a moment. The walls of my little chamber had suddenly opened. I saw again from the edge of the moor that lone figure coming down the hillside towards us, I saw that strange light flashing in my father's face, and I heard the greeting of the two men. A sick dread was in my heart.

"Was father called as a witness?" I asked.

"No. Why should he be? The man was a stranger to him. He had never seen him before."

I closed my eyes and laid back. Alice bent over me anxiously.

"I ought not to have talked about this to you," she said. "Father absolutely forbade me to, but you wanted to know the end so much. Promise not to think of it any more."

Promise not to think of it any more? Ah! if only I could have made that promise and kept it. My sister's mildly protesting words seemed

charged with the subtlest and most bitter of all irony. Already some faint premonition of the burden which I was to bear seemed dawning upon me. I remained silent and kept my eyes closed. Alice thought that I was asleep, but I knew that sleep was very far off. The white, distorted face of that dying man was before me. I saw the silent challenge and the silent duel which had passed between those two, the central figures in that marvellous little drama—one, the challenger, ghastly pale even to the tremulous lips, wild and dishevelled, my father looking down upon him with unquailing mien and proud, still face. One moment more of life, a few beats more of the pulses, and that sentence—and that sentence—what would it have grown to? I felt myself shivering as I lay there.

"Did you say that father was away now?" I asked Alice.

She nodded.

"Yes; he is staying with the Bishop for a few days. I should not be surprised if he came home to-day, though. I have written to him by every post to let him know how you are, and he was most anxious to hear directly you were well enough to talk. I have been disobeying him frightfully."

Again I closed my eyes and feigned sleep. I had heard what Alice had not, the sound of

wheels below. Suddenly she laid down her work and started up. It was my father's voice bidding the cabman "Good-night."

"I must go down to him, Kate," she declared, springing up; "I won't leave you alone for more than a minute or two."

But when the minute or two had elapsed and there was a knock at my door, it was not Alice who had returned. I answered in a low voice, and my father entered.

CHAPTER XI

THE GATHERING OF THE CLOUD

FROM my low chair I watched my father cross the room. So far as I could see there was no change in him. He came over to my side and took my hand with an air of anxious kindliness. Then he stooped down, and his lips touched my forehead.

"You are better, Kate?" he inquired, quietly.

"Quite well," I answered.

He looked at me thoughtfully, and asked a few questions about my illness, touched upon his own visit to the Bishop, and the dignity which had been offered to him. Then after a short pause, during which my heart beat fiercely, he came and sat down by my side.

"Kate! You are strong enough to listen to me while I speak just for a moment or two upon a very painful subject."

"Yes," I whispered. "Go on."

"I gather from what Alice tells me that you have already shown a very wise discretion—in a

certain matter. You have already alluded to it, it seems, and she has told you all that is known. Something, of course, must have at once occurred to you—I mean the fact that I have not thought it well to disclose the fact that you and I together met that unfortunate man on the common, and that he asked me the way to the Yellow House."

"I was bewildered when I found that you had not mentioned it," I faltered. "I do not understand. Please tell me.

He looked steadily into my eyes. There was not the slightest disquietude in his still, stern face. My nervousness did not affect him at all. He seemed to feel no embarrassment.

"It is a matter," he said, slowly, "to which I gave a good deal of thought at the time. I came to the conclusion that for my own sake and for the sake of another that the fact of that meeting had better not be known. There are things concerning it which I may not tell you. I cannot offer you as I would like my whole confidence. Only I can say this, my disclosure of the fact of our having met the man could have done not one iota of good. It could not possibly have suggested to any one either a clue as to the nature of the crime or to the criminal himself, and bearing in mind other things of which you are happier to remain ignorant, silence became to me almost a solemn duty. It became at any rate

an absolute necessity. For the sake of others as well as for my own sake I held my peace. Association direct or indirect with such a crime would have been harmful alike to me and to the person whom he desired to visit. So I held my peace, and I require of you, Kate, that you take my pledged word as to the necessity for this silence, and that you follow my example. I desire your solemn promise that no word of that meeting shall ever pass your lips."

I did not answer. With his eyes fixed upon my face he waited. I laid my hand upon his arm.

"Father, in the church, did you see his face? Did you hear what he was saying?"

He did not shrink from me. He looked into my white, eager face without any sign of fear or displeasure.

"Yes," he answered, gravely.

"Was it—was it—you to whom he spoke?" I cried.

There was a short silence.

"I cannot answer you that question, Kate," he said.

I grasped his hand feverishly. There was a red livid mark afterwards where my nails had dug into his wrist.

"Father, would you have me go mad?" I moaned. "You know that man. You knew

who he was! You knew what he wanted—at the Yellow House."

"It is true," he answered.

"In the church I could have touched—could have touched him, he was so near to me—there was a terrible light in his face, his eyes were flaming upon you. He was like a man who suddenly understands. He called 'Judas,' and he pointed—at you."

"He was mad," my father answered, with a terrible calmness. "Every one could see that he was mad."

"Mad!" I caught at the thought. I repeated the word to myself, and forced my recollection backwards with a little shudder to those few horrible moments. After all was there any hope that this might be the interpretation? My father's voice broke in upon my thoughts.

"I do not wish to harp upon what must be a terribly painful subject to you, Kate. I only want your promise, you must take my word for everything else."

I looked at him long and steadily. If the faces of men are in any way an index to their lives, my father's should rank high—high indeed. His countenance was absolutely unruffled. There was not a single shadow of fear there, or passion of any sort; only a delicate thoughtfulness tempered with that quiet dignity which seemed

almost an inseparable characteristic of his. I took his hands in mine and clasped them fervently.

"Father," I cried, "give me your whole confidence. I will promise all that you desire, only let me know everything. I have thought sometimes—terrible thoughts—I cannot help them. They torment me now—they will torment me always. I know so much—tell me a little more. My lips shall be sealed. I mean it! Only——"

He raised his hand softly, but the words died upon my lips.

"I have nothing to tell you, child," he said, quietly. "Put that thought away from you for ever. The burden which I bear is upon my own shoulders only. God forbid that even the shadow of it should darken your young life."

"I am not afraid of any knowledge," I cried. "It is ignorance of which I am afraid. I can bear anything except these horrible, nameless fears against which I have no power. Why don't you trust me? I am old enough. I am wise enough. What you tell me shall be as sacred as God's word to me."

He shook his head without any further response. I choked back the tears from my eyes.

"There is some mystery, here," I cried. "We are all enveloped in it. What does it mean? Why did we come here?"

"We came here by pure accident," my father answered. "We came here because the curacy was offered to me; and I was glad to take anything which relieved me of my duties at Belchester."

"It was fate!—a cruel fate!" I moaned.

"It was the will of God," he answered, sternly.

Then there was a silence between us, unbroken for many minutes. My father waited by my side —waited for my answer. The despair in my heart grew deeper.

"I cannot live here," I said, "and remain ignorant."

"You must give me your promise, child," he said. "I have no power to tell you anything. You are young, and for you the terror of this thing will fade away."

I answered him then with a sinking heart.

"I promise," I said, faintly. "Only—I shall have to go away. I cannot live here. It would drive me mad."

His cold lips touched mine as he rose.

"You must do," he said, gravely, "what seems best to you. You are old enough to be the moulder of your own life. If you would be happier away, you must go. Only there is this to be remembered—I can understand that this particular place may have become distasteful to you. We are not going to live here any longer.

You will find life at Eastminster larger and more absorbing. I shall be able to do more for you than I have ever done before."

"It is not that," I interrupted, wearily. "You know that it is not that. It is between us two."

He was silent. A sudden change stole into his face. His lips quivered. An inexpressible sorrow gleamed for a moment in his dark eyes. He bent his head. Was that a tear that fell? I fancied so.

I took his hand and soothed it.

"Father, you will tell me, won't you?" I whispered. "I shall not mind. I will be brave, whatever dreadful things I may have to know. Let me share the burden."

For a moment I thought that he was yielding. He covered his face with his hands and remained silent. But when he looked up I saw that the moment of weakness had passed. He rose to his feet.

"Good-night, Kate," he said, quietly. "Thank you for your promise."

My heart sank. I returned his kiss coldly. He left me without another word.

CHAPTER XII

MR. BERDENSTEIN'S SISTER

THREE days after that memorable conversation with my father a fly drove up to the door, and from where I was sitting in our little drawing-room I heard a woman's anxious voice inquiring for Mr. Ffolliot. A moment or two later the maid knocked at my door.

"There is a young lady here, miss, inquiring for the Vicar. I told her that Mr. Ffolliot would not be in for an hour or two, and she asked if she could speak to any other member of the family."

"Do you know what she wants, Mary?" I asked.

The girl shook her head.

"No, miss. She would not say what her business was. She just wants to see one of you, she said."

"You had better tell her that I am at home, and show her in here if she wishes to see me," I directed.

She ushered in a young lady, short, dark, and

thin. Her eyes were swollen as though with weeping, and her whole appearance seemed to indicate that she was in trouble. She sank into the chair to which I motioned her, and burst into tears.

"You must please forgive me," she exclaimed, in a voice broken with sobs. "I have just come from abroad, and I have had a terrible shock."

Some instinct seemed to tell me the truth.

My heart stood still.

"Are you any relation of the gentleman who was—who died here last week?" I asked, quickly.

She nodded.

"I have just been to the police-station," she said. "It is his watch—the one I gave him—and his pocket-book, with a half-written letter to me in it. They have shown me his photograph. It is my brother, Stephen Berdenstein. He was the only relative I had left in the world."

I was really shocked, and I looked at her pitifully. "I am so sorry," I said. "It must be terrible for you."

She commenced to sob again, and I feared that she would have hysterics. She was evidently very nervous, and very much overwrought. I was never particularly good at administering consolation, and I could think of nothing better to do than to ring the bell and order some tea.

"He was to have joined me in Paris on

Saturday," she continued after a minute or two. "He did not come and he sent a message. When Monday morning came and there was no letter from him, I felt sure that something had happened. I bought the English papers, and by chance I read about the murder. It seemed absurd to connect it with Stephen, especially as he told me he was going to be in London, but the description was so like him that I could not rest. I telegraphed to his bankers, and they replied that he had gone down into the country, but had left no address. So I crossed at once, and when I found that he had not been heard of at his club in London or anywhere else for more than ten days, I came down here. I went straight to the police-station, and—and——"

She burst into tears again. I came over to her side and tried my best to be sympathetic. I am afraid that it was not a very successful attempt, for my thoughts were wholly engrossed in another direction. However, I murmured a few platitudes, and presently she became more coherent. She even accepted some tea, and bathed her face with some eau de Cologne, which I fetched from my room.

"Have you any idea," I asked her presently, "why your brother came to this part of the country at all. He was staying at Lady Naselton's, was he not? Was she an old friend?"

She shook her head.

"I never heard him speak of her in my life. He wrote to me of a young Mr. Naselton who had visited him in Rio, but even in his last letter from Southampton he did not say a word about visiting them. He would have come straight to me, he said, but for a little urgent business in London."

"And yet he seems to have accepted a casual invitation, and came down here within a day or two of his arrival in England," I remarked.

"I cannot understand it!" she exclaimed, passionately. "Stephen and I have not met for many years—he has been living in South America, and I have been in Paris—but he wrote to me constantly, and in every letter he repeated how eagerly he was looking forward to seeing me again. I cannot think that he would have come down here just as an ordinary visit of civility before coming to me, or sending for me to come to him. There must be something behind it—something of which I do not know."

"You know, of course, that Naselton Hall is shut up and that the Naseltons have gone to Italy?" I asked her.

"They told me so at the police-station," she answered. "I have sent Lady Naselton a telegram. It is a long time since I saw Stephen, and one does not tell everything in letters. He

may have formed great friendships of which I have never heard."

"Or great enmities," I suggested, softly.

"Or enmities," she repeated, thoughtfully. "Yes; he may have made enemies. That is possible. He was passionate, and he was wilful. He was the sort of a man who made enemies."

She was quite calm now, and I had a good look at her. She was certainly plain. Her face was sharp and thin, and her eyes were a dull, dark colour. She was undersized and ungraceful, in addition to which she was dressed much too richly for travelling, and in questionable taste. So far as I could recollect there was not the slightest resemblance between her and the dead man.

She surprised me in the middle of my scrutiny, but she did not seem to notice it. She had evidently been thinking something out.

"You have not lived here very long, Miss Ffolliot?" she asked, "have you?"

I shook my head.

"Only a month or so."

"I suppose," she continued, "you know the names of most of the principal families round here. A good many of them would call upon you, no doubt?"

"I believe I know most of them, by name at any rate," I told her.

"Do you know any family of the name of Maltabar?" she asked — "particularly a man called Philip Maltabar?"

I shook my head at once with a sense of relief which I could not altogether conceal.

"No, I never heard it in my life," I answered. "I am quite sure that there is no family of that name of any consequence around here. I must have heard it, and it is too uncommon a one to be overlooked."

The brief light died out of her face. She was evidently disappointed.

"You are quite sure?"

"Absolutely certain."

She sighed.

"I am sorry," she said. "Philip Maltabar is the one man I know who hated my brother. There has been a terrible and lifelong enmity between them. It has lasted since they were boys. I believe that it was to avoid him that my brother first went to South America. If there had been a Maltabar living anywhere around here I should have known where to go for vengeance."

"Is it well to think of that, and so soon?" I asked, quietly. The girl's aspect had changed. I looked away from her with a little shudder.

"What else is there for me to think of?" she demanded. "Supposing it were you, it would be

different. You have other relatives. I have none. I am left alone in the world. My brother may have had his faults, but to me he was everything. Can you wonder that I hate the person who has deprived me of him?"

"You are not sure—it is not certain that there was not an accident—that he did not kill himself," I suggested.

She dismissed the idea with scorn.

"Accident! What accident could there have been? It is not possible. As to taking his own life, it is ridiculous! Why should he? He was too fond of it. Other men might have done that, but Stephen — never! No. He was murdered in that little plantation. I know the exact spot. I have been there. There was a struggle, and some one, better prepared than he, killed him. Perhaps he was followed here from London. It may be so. And yet, what was he doing here at all? That visit to Naselton Hall was not without some special purpose. I am sure of it. It was in connection with that purpose that he met with his death. He must have come to see some one. I want to know who it was. That is what I am going to find out—whom he came to see. You can blame me if you like. It may be unchristian, and you are a parson's daughter. I do not care. I am going to find out."

I was silent. In a measure I was sorry for her, but down in my heart there lurked the seeds of a fear—nameless, but terribly potent—which put me out of all real sympathy with her. I began to wish that she would go away. I had answered her questions, and I had done all—more—than common courtesy demanded. Yet she sat there without any signs of moving.

"I suppose," she said at last, finding that I kept silent, "that it would not be of any use waiting to see your father. He has not been here any longer than you have. He would not be any more likely to know anything of the man Maltabar?"

I shook my head decidedly.

"He would be far less likely to know of him than I should," I assured her. "He knows a good deal less of the people around here. His interests are altogether amongst the poorer classes. And he has left my sister and me to receive and pay all the calls. He is not at all fond of society."

"Philip Maltabar may be poor—now," she said, musingly. "He was never rich."

"If he were poor, he would not be living here," I said. "The poor of whom I speak are the peasantry. It is not like a town, you know. Any man such as the Mr. Maltabar you speak of would be more than ever a marked figure living

out of his class amongst villagers. In any case he would not be the sort of man whom my father would be likely to visit."

"I suppose you are right," she answered, doubtfully. "At any rate—since I am here—there would be no harm in asking your father, would there?"

"Certainly not," I answered. "I daresay he will be here in a few moments."

Almost as I spoke he passed the window, and I heard his key in the front door. The girl, who had seen his shadow, looked up quickly.

"Is that he?" she asked.

I nodded.

"Yes. You can ask him for yourself now."

"I should like to," she answered. "I am so glad I stayed."

Some instinct prompted me to rise and leave the room. I went out and met my father in the hall.

"Father," I said, "there is a girl here who says she has identified that man. She is his sister. She is waiting to see you."

My father had evidently come in tired out; he leaned against the wall for support. He was out of breath, too, and pale.

"What does she want with me?" he asked, sharply.

"She came to ask if we knew of any family

of the name of Maltabar. Philip Maltabar, it seems, is the name of a man who has been her brother's enemy. She thinks that this thing must have been his doing. She cannot think of any one else with whom he has ever been on bad terms. I have told her that there is no one of that name in these parts."

He cleared his throat. He was very hoarse and ghastly pale.

"Quite right, Kate," he said. "There is no one of that name around here. What more does she want? What does she want of me?"

"I told her that I knew of no one, but she came to see you in the first place. She does not seem quite satisfied. She wants to ask you herself."

He drew back a step.

"No! no! I cannot see her. I am tired—ill. I have walked too far. Tell her from me that there is no one of that name living in these parts. I am absolutely sure of it. She can take it for granted from me."

"Hadn't you better see her just for one moment, as she has waited for so long?" I said. "She will be better satisfied."

He ground his heel down into the floor.

"No! I will not! I have had too much worry and trouble in connection with this affair already. My nerves are all unstrung. I cannot discuss it

again with any one. Please let her understand that from me as kindly as possible, but firmly. I am going to my study. Don't come to see me again until she has gone."

He crossed the hall and entered his own room. I heard the key turn in the lock after him. It was useless to say anything more. I went back to my visitor.

I entered noiselessly, as I was wearing house shoes, and was surprised to find her with the contents of my card-plate spread out before her. She flushed up to the temples when she saw me standing on the threshold, yet she was not particularly apologetic.

"I am very rude," she said, brusquely. "I had no right, of course, to take such a liberty, but I thought—it might be barely possible—that you had forgotten the name, that some one might have called when you were not at home, or that, perhaps, your sister might have met them."

"Oh, pray satisfy yourself." I said, icily. "You are quite welcome to look them through."

She put the card-plate down.

"I have looked at all of them," she said. "There is no name anything like it there. Is your father coming in?"

"He is not very well," I told her, "and is quite tired out. He has walked a long way this afternoon. He wishes you to excuse him, and to say

that he is quite sure that there is no one of that name, rich or poor, living anywhere in this neighbourhood."

She seemed by no means satisfied.

"But shall I not be able to see him at all, then?" she exclaimed. "I had hoped that as he was the clergyman here, and was one of those who were with my brother when he died, that he would be certain to help me."

I shook my head.

"I am afraid that you will think it very selfish," I said, "but my father would rather not see you at all. He is in very delicate health, and this affair has already been a terrible shock to him. He does not want to have anything more to do with it directly or indirectly. He wants to forget it if he can. He desires me to offer you his most sincere sympathy. But you must really excuse him."

She rose slowly to her feet; her manner was obviously ungracious.

"Oh, very well!" she said. "Of course if he has made up his mind not to see me, I cannot insist. At the same time, I think it very strange. Good afternoon."

I rang the bell, and walked with her to the door.

"Is there anything else which I can do for you?" I asked.

"No, thank you. I think I shall telegraph to London for a detective. I shall see what they say at the police-station. Good afternoon."

She did not offer to shake hands, nor did I. I think of all the women I had ever met, I detested her the most.

I watched her walk down the drive with short, mincing steps and get into a fly. Then I went to the door of my father's room and knocked.

CHAPTER XIII

FOR VENGEANCE

I knocked at the door twice before there was any answer. Then I heard my father's voice from the other end of the room.

"Is that you, Kate?"

"Yes," I answered. "Can I come in?"

The door was not immediately unlocked.

"Has she gone?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered.

He opened it then, and I was frightened to see how ill he looked. He had evidently been lying down, for the cushions on his sofa were disarranged.

"She has gone away, then," he repeated, anxiously.

I nodded.

"Yes."

"Was she annoyed because I did not see her?"

"She was disappointed," I admitted. "She was very ungracious and very disagreeable; a

most objectionable person altogether. I don't know how I managed to be civil with her."

"You explained that I was not well—that I was not fit to see any one?"

"I did my best. She was very unreasonable, and she evidently expected that you would have made an effort to see her. She went away grumbling."

He sat down upon the sofa, and I leaned against the table.

"Has she gone back to London?" he asked.

"I do not know, I don't think so. She said something about going back to the police-station and wiring to London for a detective."

"Ah!"

He had closed his eyes. I heard him draw in a long, sharp breath.

"She is a very determined young woman," I continued. "Perhaps I ought not to say so, but she seemed to feel more angry than broken-hearted. She is vindictive, I am sure. She will do her best to find the man who killed her brother, and if she finds him she will have no mercy."

My father rose up and walked to his writing-table. His back was turned to me as he commenced to sort out some papers.

"Perhaps," he said, "that is natural. It is very hard indeed to remember that vengeance belongs

to God, and not to man. It is very hard indeed. Leave me now, Kate, and see that I am not disturbed for an hour."

I closed his door softly, and walked out into the garden, across the lawn to the edge. Below me was the little plantation, ill-famed and suddenly notorious as the scene of that terrible tragedy. Every tree seemed clearly defined and beautiful in that soft autumn twilight. I looked at it with a curious sense of shuddering fear. That girl's face, hungry for vengeance, the code of blood for blood —it was terrible. But the vengeance of God—more awful, if not so swift as hers—on whom was that to fall?

A heavy step in the road brought me, with a little sense of relief, back to the present. The tall form of Mr. Bruce Deville came in sight. He passed so close to me that I could have touched him.

"Good-night, Mr. Deville," I said, softly, in his ear.

He started almost over to the other side of the road. Then he saw me, and lifted his cap.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "I beg your pardon, Miss Ffolliot. How you startled me!"

"I am very sorry," I said, penitently.

He looked at me and laughed. "You may be," he said; "but you don't look it. I am glad that you are better."

"I am quite well, thank you," I answered. "I am glad to see you Mr. Deville. I wanted to thank you for those beautiful roses. I could not believe that they came from you."

He looked a little embarrassed.

"They are not worth mentioning," he muttered. "Besides, it was Adelaide's idea. She thought that you would like them."

I felt a little needlessly disappointed. Doubtless I answered him a little coldly.

"I must thank Mrs. Fortress for them, then! Very well; I will go down and see her to-morrow."

"I don't think," he said, with a slight twinkle in his eyes, "that you need go down specially. Mrs. Fortress only answered my question when I asked her if she thought that you would care for them."

"Oh, is that all?" I remarked.

"Entirely," he answered. "At the same time, if you have any time to spare I daresay Mrs. Fortress would be glad to see you if you went down."

"Do you think she would, really?" I asked. "You know the first time I was there, something a little unpleasant happened in connection with my father. I took a great fancy to her, and I would like to go and see her again, but I am not sure whether she wants me. I fancy she was very surprised at my visit the other night."

"I am perfectly certain," he declared, confidently, "that she would be glad to see you any time you chose to go to her. You may take my word for that."

"I think I will go to-morrow, then," I said. "Mrs. Fortress interests me very much. There is no one else round here like her."

"You are very friendly with my godmamma, are you not?" he said, with a faint smile at the corners of his lips.

"Lady Naselton has been very kind to me," I answered.

"I am afraid she gives me a dreadful character, doesn't she?" he asked.

"If she does you probably deserve it," I said, severely. "I fancy that I have heard her say that you are exceedingly shiftless and very lazy. You could scarcely deny that, could you?"

"Well, I don't know," he answered. "I have walked twenty or thirty miles to-day. That doesn't sound particularly lazy, does it?"

"On sport or business?" I inquired.

He laughed, and looked down at himself. His clothes were splashed with mud, and a bramble had torn his coat in a fresh place.

"I maintain that it is immaterial," he declared. "I've been out all day, and I haven't sat down for more than an hour. Therefore I deny the laziness *in toto*."

"At any rate," I continued, "there is another charge against you, which you certainly can't deny."

"And that is?"

"Untidiness! We used to have a woman call upon us at Belchester to buy our old clothes. If ever she comes here I shall certainly send her up to Deville Court."

He laughed gruffly.

"I wish you would; I'd sell her the whole lot. Anything else?"

"The other things," I said, "were too bad to repeat. I have only been enumerating your minor faults."

He made me an ironical bow.

"I am exceedingly obliged to my godmother," he said. "Some day I shall do myself the pleasure of paying her a visit and suggesting that she should mind her own business."

"Your business is her business to the extent of her godmotherhood," I reminded him, suavely.

"Hang her godmotherhood!" he uttered under his breath. I think it was "hang" he said—I was not sure about the expletive.

"I shall go away," I said. "You are getting profane. You are still as rude as when I bound your dog's leg for you, I see."

He was suddenly grave.

"That seems a long time ago," he remarked.

"A week or two only," I reminded him. "It seems longer, because of all that has happened. That reminds me, Mr. Deville. I wanted to speak to you — about — that Sunday — the murder!"

He shook his head, and whistled to his dogs.

"Can't talk about it," he declared. "You ought not to want to."

"And why not?" I demanded.

"You are not well enough. I don't wonder that you've been ill. You must have been within a few yards of the fellow all the time. Certainly you must not talk about it. Good evening."

"But there is something I want to ask you," I continued.

He shook his head. He was already moving away. I called him back.

"Mr. Deville! One moment, please."

He paused and looked over his shoulder.

"Well!"

"I want to ask you just one thing about that man."

I was talking to empty space. Bruce Deville was already almost out of sight, striding along across the short turf, with his broad back turned to me. Soon he had vanished amongst the shadows. There was nothing for me to do but to return to the house.

CHAPTER XIV

ADELAIDE FORTRESS'S GUEST

MY FATHER did not appear at breakfast time the next morning, and Alice, who took him up some tea, came down in some concern.

"Father is not getting up until this afternoon, at any rate," she announced. "He is very unwell. I wish he would let us send for a doctor. He has looked so dreadfully ill since he came back from London."

Under the circumstances I was perhaps less alarmed than I might have otherwise been. It was clear to me that he did not wish to see the girl who had called upon me yesterday. I was strongly inclined to look upon his present indisposition as somewhat exaggerated with a view to escaping a meeting with her. But I was soon to be undeceived. I went up to him after breakfast, and, gaining no answer to my knock at the door, I entered softly. He was lying quite still upon the bed, partially dressed, and at first I

thought that he was asleep. I moved to his side on tiptoe, and a sudden shock of fear drove the colour from my face, and set my heart beating wildly. His eyes were closed, his cheeks were pale as death. Upon his side, underneath his waistcoat, was a linen bandage, half soaked with blood. Evidently he had fainted in the act of fastening it.

I got some brandy and forced it between his lips, chafed his hands, and gradually the life seemed to return to him. He opened his eyes and looked at me.

"Don't move!" I whispered. "I will see to the bandage."

He lay quite still, groaning every now and then until I had finished. Then I drew the counterpane over him, and waited for a moment or two. He opened his eyes and looked at me.

"I am going to send for a doctor," I whispered, leaning over him.

He clutched my hand.

"I forbid it," he answered, hoarsely. "Do not dare to think of it, Kate! Do you hear?"

"But this is serious!" I cried. "You will be very ill."

"It is only a flesh wound," he muttered. "I scarcely feel it; only—I drew the bandage too tightly."

"How long have you had it?" I asked.

He looked towards the door; it was closed.

"Since I was in London. It was a cowardly attack—the night before I returned. I have gone armed ever since. I am safe now—quite safe."

I was sorely perplexed. He was watching me with bright, feverish eyes.

"Promise, Kate, that you will not send for a doctor, unless I give you leave," he whispered, eagerly. "Your solemn promise, Kate; I must have it."

"On condition that you let me see to the bandages for you then," I answered, reluctantly.

"Very good! You can. They will want changing to-night. I am going to sleep now."

He closed his eyes and turned his face to the wall. I stole softly out of the room and downstairs. The sight of Alice's calm and placid features as she busied herself about the affairs of the house and the parish was a constant irritation to me. I could not sit down or settle to any work. A fit of nervous restlessness came over me. Outside was a storm of wind and rain, but even that I felt at last was better than inaction; so I put on my coat and hat and walked across the soddened turf and down the drive with the fresh, stinging rain in my face. I passed out into the road, and after a moment's hesitation took the turn towards the Yellow House.

I do not know what prompted me to go and see Adelaide Fortress. It was a sudden impulse, and I yielded to it promptly. But I had scarcely taken half a dozen steps before I found myself face to face with Bruce Deville. He stopped short, and looked at me with surprise.

"You are not afraid of rough weather, Miss Ffolliot," he remarked, raising his cap, with, for him, unusual courtesy.

"I fear many things worse," I answered, looking down into the wood. "Are you going to see Mrs. Fortress?"

"Yes, presently," he assented. "In the meantime, I was rather thinking—I want a word with your father."

"What about?" I asked, abruptly.

He looked at me intently. There was a new look upon his face which I scarcely understood. Was it pity. It was almost like it. He seemed to be wondering how much I knew—or surmised.

"It is a matter of some importance," he said, gravely. "I wish I could tell you. You look sensible, like a girl who might be told."

His words did not offend me in the least. On the contrary, I think that I was pleased.

"Mr. Deville," I said, firmly, "I agree with you. I am a girl who might be told. I only wish that my father would be open with me. There is some mystery around, some danger. I can see

it all in your faces; I can feel it in the air. That man's death"—I pointed into the wood—"is concerned in it. What does it all mean? I want to know. I want you to tell me."

He sighed.

"I am not the one to whom you should appeal," he said. "I have not the right to tell you anything; you may know very soon. In the meantime, will you tell me where your father is?"

"He is at home," I answered, "in bed. He is ill. I do not think that he will see you. He is not going to get up to-day."

Mr. Deville did not appear in the least disturbed or disappointed. On the contrary, his face cleared, and I think that he was relieved.

"I am glad to hear it," he answered.

"Why?"

"He is better out of the way just for the present. When does he take up his new appointment?"

"I am not sure that any definite time has been fixed," I answered. "In about a month I should think."

"I heard about it yesterday," he remarked. "Your stay here has not been a long one, has it?"

"Would to God that we had never come at all!" I exclaimed, fervently. "It has been the most miserable time in my life."

"I don't know that I can echo that wish," he said, with a faint smile. "Yet so far as you are concerned, from your point of view, I suppose your coming here must have seemed very unfortunate. It is a pity."

"Mr. Deville," I said, drawing close to his side, "I am going to ask you a question."

He looked down at me shaking his head.

"I should rather you asked me no question at all," he answered, promptly. "Can't we talk of other things?"

"No, we cannot! Listen!"

I laid my hand upon his arm, and forced him to turn towards me.

"Tell me who that man was, and who killed him?" I asked, firmly. "I have a right to know. I am determined to know!"

He was certainly paler underneath the dark tan of his sun and weather-burned cheeks. Yet he answered me steadily enough.

"Take my advice, Miss Ffolliot, ask no questions about it, have no thought about it. Put it away from you. I speak for your happiness, which, perhaps, I am more interested in than you would believe."

Afterwards I wondered at that moment of embarrassment, and the little break in his voice. Just then the excitement of the moment made me almost oblivious of it.

"You are telling me!" I cried

"I am not telling you; I am not telling you because I do not know. For God's sake ask me no more questions! Come and see Adelaide Fortress. You were going there, were you not?"

"Yes, I was going there," I admitted.

"We will go together," he said. "She will be glad to see you, I am sure. Mind the mud; it's horribly slippery."

We descended the footpath together. Just as we reached the gates of the Yellow house, I turned to him.

"You were speaking of going to see my father this afternoon," I said. "Can I give him any message for you?"

"Tell him that I am sorry to hear of his illness, but that I am glad that he is taking care of himself," he answered, looking down at me. "Tell him that the weather is bad, and that he will do well to take care of himself. He is better in his room just at present."

We were inside the gates of the Yellow House, and I had not time to ask him the meaning of this unusual solicitude for my father's health. I was still puzzling over it when we were shown into the drawing-room. Then for a moment I forgot it, and everything else altogether. Adelaide Fortress

had a visitor sitting opposite to her and talking earnestly.

The conversation ceased suddenly, and she looked up as we entered. There was no mistaking the long, sallow face and anxious eyes. She looked at me with indifference, but at the sight of my companion she jumped up and a little cry broke from her lips. Her eyes seemed to be devouring him.

"At last!" she cried. "At last!"

CHAPTER XV

THE LIKENESS OF PHILIP MALTABAR

WE stood looking at them in wonder. Her face had seemed suddenly to light up in some mysterious way, so that for the moment one quite forgot that she was plain at all.

"It is really you!" she murmured. "How wonderful!" She held out both her hands. Bruce Deville took them a little awkwardly. It was easy to see that her joy at this meeting was not altogether reciprocated. But she seemed utterly unconscious of that. There was quite a becoming pink flush on her sallow cheeks, and her dark eyes were wonderfully soft. Her lips were parted with a smile of welcome, and showed all her teeth—she had gleaming white teeth, beautifully shaped and regular.

"To think that we should meet again like this," she continued, parting with his great brown hand with some evident reluctance.

"We were bound to meet again some day," he answered, deprecatingly. "After all, there is

nothing very extraordinary about it. The world is a small place."

"You never kept your promise," she reminded him, reproachfully. "You never came near our hotel. I waited for you a week."

"I could not; I was leaving Baeren that same afternoon."

She turned to us at last.

"This is the most delightful meeting in the world, so far as I am concerned," she declared, still a little breathlessly. "Mr. Deville once saved my life."

He made some sort of a protest, but she took no notice. She was determined to tell her story.

"I was travelling with a friend through the Italian lakes, and we were out for a drive near Baeren. We were coming down a terrible hill, with a precipice on one side and the sheer mountain on the other. The road was only just wide enough for our carriage, and suddenly a great bird flew out from a hole in the mountain and startled our horses. The driver must have been half asleep, and when they plunged he lost his balance and was thrown off. The horses started galloping down the hill. It was almost like the side of a house, and just in front was a sharp turn, with only a little frail palisading, and the precipice just below. We must have gone straight over. He could not possibly have turned

at the pace they were going. If they had the carriage must have swung over. We were clinging to one another, and I am afraid we were dreadful cowards. It was like certain and fearful death, and just then Mr. Deville came round the corner. He seemed to see it all in a moment, and ran to meet us. Oh, it was horrible!" she cried, throwing her hands up with a little shiver. "I shall never forget it until I die. Never!"

She paused for a moment. Adelaide Fortress and I had been hanging over her every word. There was something very thrilling about the way she told her story. Mr. Deville alone seemed uninterested, and a little impatient. He was turning over the pages of a magazine, with a restless frown upon his strong, dark face.

"It seemed to me," she continued, lowering her shaking voice, "that he was down under the horses, being dragged——"

Bruce Deville closed the magazine he had been reading with a bang. He had evidently been a passive auditor as long as he was able to endure it. "Let me finish," he said, shortly. "I am blessed with strong arms, and I stopped the horses. It was not a particularly difficult task. The ladies walked back to the hotel, and I went to look for the driver, who had broken his leg."

"And I have never seen him since!" she exclaimed, breathlessly.

"Well, I couldn't help that," he continued. "I believe I promised to come to the hotel and call upon you, but when I thought it over it really didn't seem worth while. I was on my way to Geneva, walking over the hills, and I was rather anxious to get there, and as I found some men to take the carriage and the driver back, I thought I might as well continue my journey. I wanted to get to Geneva for my letters."

She laughed quietly. Her eyes continually sought his, soft with admiration and pleasure.

"You are like all the men of your country, who are brave and noble," she said. "You will do a great deed, but you do not like to be thanked. Yet we waited there for days, hoping to see you. I have looked for you wherever I have been since then, and to think that now—on this very saddest journey I have ever been forced to take—that I should call here, by accident, and the door should open, and you should walk in. Ah!"

"It is quite a romance," Adelaide Fortress remarked, with a faint smile upon her lips. "How grateful you must be that you came to see me this afternoon, Bruce! By the by, do you mind ringing the bell—unless you prefer stewed tea?"

He got up and rang it with avidity.

"I am glad you recognise the fact that we have come to tea," he remarked. "Miss Ffolliot and I

met at the gate. You ought to give us something specially good for venturing out on such a day."

"I will give you some Buszard's cake," she answered, laughing; "some kind friend sent it me this morning. Only you mustn't eat it all up; it has to last me for a week."

"How is your father, Miss Ffolliot?" the girl asked, turning to me abruptly.

"I am sorry to say that he is very unwell," I answered, "and he is obliged to keep to his room. And I am afraid that he will not be able to leave it for several days."

She did not appear much concerned. I watched her closely, and with much relief.

"I am sorry," she remarked, politely. "However, so far as I am concerned, I suppose after all there would be very little object in my seeing him. I have been to most of the oldest residents round here, and they all seem certain that they have never heard of the name Maltabar.

I saw Bruce Deville start, and the hand which held his teacup shook. Adelaide Fortress and he exchanged swift glances. The girl, whose eyes were scarcely off him for a moment, noticed it too, although I doubt if she attached the same significance to it.

"You do not know—you have not heard recently of any one of that name?" she asked

him. "Please tell me! I have a reason for being very much interested."

He shook his head.

"If I have ever heard the name at all it must have been very long ago," he said; "and certainly not in connection with this part of the world."

She sighed.

"I suppose you do not know who I am, or why I am here," she said. "My name I told you once, although I daresay you have forgotten it. It is Berdenstein. The man who was found dead, who was killed close to here, was my brother."

He murmured a few words of sympathy, but he showed no surprise. I suspected that he had known who she was and of her presence here before.

"Of course I came here directly I heard of it," she continued, ignoring us altogether, and talking only to him. "It is a terrible trouble to me, and he was the only relative I had left in the world. You cannot wonder, can you, that I want to find out all about it?"

"That is a very hard task," he said. "It is a task best left, I think, in the hands of the proper authorities."

"They do not know as much as I know," she answered. "He had an enemy."

"The man Maltabar, of whom you spoke?"

"Yes. It was for him I inquired at once. Yet I suppose I must conclude that he is not at any rate a resident around here. I thought that he might have changed his name, and I have described him to a great many people. Nobody seems to recognise him."

"Don't you think," Adelaide Fortress said, quietly, "that you have done all that it is possible for any one to do? The police are doing their utmost to solve the mystery of your brother's death. If I were you I should leave it to them."

She shook her head.

"I am not satisfied to do nothing," she said. "You cannot imagine what it feels like to lose some one very dear to you in such a terrible way. I think of it sometimes until I tremble with passion, and I think that if I could meet the man who did it face to face, I would stab him to the heart myself, with my own hands. I am weak, but I feel that I could do it. I cannot go away from here if I would. Something seems to tell me that the key to the whole mystery lies here—just at hand. No, I cannot go away. I must watch and wait. It may come to me at any moment."

No one answered her. She was conscious of a certain antagonism to her, betrayed by our lack of response to that little outburst and our averted faces. She looked from one to the other of us, and finally at Bruce Deville.

"I see what you mean," she said, slowly. "You mean that my brother must first have been the sinner."

"I am not taking that for granted," he said, hastily; "only one cannot help thinking sometimes that it might have been so."

"He was my brother," she said, simply. "He was all that I had in the world. My desire for justice may be selfish. Yet I hate the man who

killed him, and I want to see him punished. I do not believe that any sin of his could ever have deserved so terrible a retribution."

"Perhaps not," he said; "yet there is so little that you can do. To search for any one by the name of Maltabar around here you have proved a hopeless task; and that is your only clue, is it not?"

"I am sending," she said, "for a London detective. I shall remain here until he arrives, at any rate."

Again we looked at one another questioningly, and our silence was like a fresh note of antagonism to her avowed purpose. She could not fail to notice it, and she commenced to talk of other things. I believe but for Mr. Deville's presence she would have got up and left us. Open war with us women could not have troubled her in the least. Already I could tell that she had contracted a dislike to me. But for his sake she was evidently anxious—oppressively anxious—to keep friendly.

She tried to draw him into more personal conversation with her, and he seemed quite ready to humour her. He changed his seat and sat down by her side. Adelaide Fortress and I talked listlessly of the Bishop's visit and our intending removal from the neighbourhood. We studiously avoided all mention of my last visit to her and its

sensational ending. We talked as ordinary acquaintances might have talked, about trifles. Yet we were both of us equally conscious that to a certain extent it was a farce. Presently there was a brief silence. The girl was talking to Mr. Deville, evidently of her brother.

"He was so fond of collecting old furniture," she was saying. "So am I. He gave me a little cabinet, the image of this one, only mine was in black oak."

She bent over a little piece of furniture by her side, and looked at it with interest.

"Mine was exactly this shape," she continued; "only it had a wonderful secret spring. You pressed it just here and the top flew up, and there was space enough for a deed or a photograph."

She touched a portion of the woodwork idly as she spoke, and there was a sort of click. Then she sprang to her feet with a little tremulous cry.

A portion of the back of the cabinet had rolled back at the touch of her fingers. A cabinet photograph was disclosed in the niche. She was bending over it with pale cheeks and bloodless lips.

"What is it?" I cried, with a sudden pain at my heart. "What have you found there?"

She turned around and faced Adelaide Fortress. Her eyes were flashing fire.

"You are all deceiving me," she cried, passion-

ately. "I was beginning to suspect it. Now I know.

"What do you mean?" I cried.

She pointed to the photograph with trembling fingers.

"You have all declared that the name of Maltabar is strange to you. It is a lie! That is the likeness of the man I seek. It is the likeness of Philip Maltabar."

CHAPTER XVI

"IT WAS MY FATHER"

THE two women were standing face to face. Bruce Deville and I had fallen back. There was a moment or two's breathless silence. Then Adelaide Fortress, with perfect composure, moved over to the girl's side, and glanced over her shoulder.

"That," she said, quietly, "is the photograph of a man who has been dead twenty years. His name was not Maltabar."

"That," repeated the girl, unshaken, "is the photograph of Philip Maltabar."

I stepped forward to look at it, but, as if divining my purpose, Adelaide Fortress touched the spring and the aperture was hidden.

"That photograph," she repeated, coldly, "is the likeness of an old and dear friend of mine who is dead. I do not feel called upon to tell you his name. It was not Maltabar."

"I do not believe you," she said, steadily. "I believe that you are all in a conspiracy against

me. I am sorry I ever told you my story. I am sorry I ever sat down under your roof. I believe that Philip Maltabar lives, and that he is not far away. We shall see!"

She moved to the door. Mr. Deville stood there ready to open it. She looked up at him—as a woman can look sometimes.

"You at least are not against me," she murmured. "Say that you are not! Say that you will be my friend once more!"

He bent down and said something to her very quietly, which we did not hear, and when she left the room he followed her. We heard the hall door slam. Through the window we could see them walking down the gravel path side by side. She was talking eagerly, flashing quick little glances up at him, and her fingers lay upon his coat-sleeve. He was listening gravely with downcast head.

Adelaide Fortress looked from them to me with a peculiar smile. What she said seemed a little irrelevant.

"How she will bore him!"

"Oh! I don't know," I answered, with an irritation whose virulence surprised me. "Men like that sort of thing."

"Not Mr. Deville," she said "He will hate it."

I was not sure about it. I watched them disappear. He was stooping down so as to catch

every word she said. Obviously he was doing his best to adapt himself and to be properly sympathetic. I was angry with myself and ignorant of the cause of my anger.

"Never mind about them," I said, abruptly. "There is something else—more important—Mrs. Fortress."

"Yes."

"I want to see that photograph—the photograph of the man whom she called Philip Maltabar."

She shook her head. Was it my fancy, or was she indeed a shade paler?

"Don't ask me that," she said, slowly. "I would rather not show it to any one."

"But I have asked you, and I ask again!" I exclaimed. "There are already too many things around me which I do not understand. I am not a child, and I am weary of all this mystery. I insist upon seeing that photograph."

She laid her hands upon my shoulders, and looked up into my face.

"Child," she said, slowly, "it were better for you not to see that photograph. Can't you believe me when I tell you so. It will be better for you and better for all of us. Don't ask me to show it you."

"I would take you at your word," I answered, "only I have already some idea. I caught a fugitive glimpse of it just now, before you touched

the spring. To know even the worst is better than to be continually dreading it."

She crossed the room in silence, and bending over the cabinet touched the spring. The picture smiled out upon me. It was the likeness of a young man—gay, supercilious, debonair—yet I knew it—knew it at once. The forehead and the mouth, even the pose of the head was unchanged. It was my father.

"He called himself once, then, Philip Maltabar?" I cried, hoarsely.

She nodded.

"It was long ago."

"It is for him the girl is searching. It is he who was her brother's enemy; it is——"

She held my hand and looked around her fearfully.

"Be careful," she said, softly. "The girl may have returned. It is not a thing to be even whispered about. Be silent, and keep your own counsel."

Then I covered my face with my hands, and my throat was choked with hard, dry sobs. The thing which I had most feared had come to pass. The scene in the church rose up again before my eyes. I saw the fierce gestures of a dying man, the froth on his lips, as he struggled with the words of denunciation, the partial utterance of which had killed him. With a little shiver I

recognised how narrow had been my father's escape. For I could no longer have any real doubts. It was my father who had killed Stephen Berdenstein.

CHAPTER XVII

A CONFERENCE OF TWO

IN the wood half-way between the Yellow House and home I met Bruce Deville. I should have hurried on, but it was impossible to pass him. He had a way of standing which took up the whole path.

"Miss Ffolliot," he said, "may I walk home with you?"

"It is only a few steps," I answered. "Please don't trouble."

"It will be a pleasure," he said, sturdily.

I looked at him; such a faint, acrimonious smile.

"Haven't you been almost polite enough for one day?" I asked.

He seemed to be genuinely surprised at my ill-humour.

"You mean, I suppose, because I walked home with that girl," he answered. "I did so on your account only. I wanted to know what she was going to do."

"I did not require any explanation," I remarked.

He seemed perplexed. Men are such idiots. In the end he ignored my speech.

"I wanted to see you," he began, thoughtfully. "I have been to call at the Vicarage; your sister would not let me see your father."

"I am not surprised at that," I answered; "you do not realise how ill he is."

"Have you had a doctor to see him?" he asked.

"No; he will not let me send for one," I answered. "Yet I know he is in need of medical advice. It is very hard to know what to do for the best."

"If I may advise you," he said, slowly, "I should strongly recommend your doing exactly as your father wishes. He knows best what is well for him. Only tell him this from me. Tell him that change will be his best medicine. I heard yesterday that the Bishop wished him to go to Eastminster at once. Let him get an invalid carriage and go there to-morrow. It will be better for him and safer."

I stopped short, and laid my hand upon his wrist. I tried to make him look at me; but he kept his face turned away.

"You are not thinking of his health only," I said; "there is something else. I know a good deal, you need not fear. You can speak openly. It is that girl."

He did not deny it. He looked down at me,

and his strong, harsh face was softened in a peculiar manner. I knew that he was very sorry for me, and there was a lump in my throat.

"What is she going to do?" I asked, trembling. "What does she suspect?"

"Nothing definite," he answered, quickly. "She is bewildered. She is going to stay here and watch. I am afraid that she will send for a detective. It is not that she has any suspicion as to your father. It is you whom she distrusts—you and Adelaide. She thinks that you are trying to keep your father from her. She thinks that he could tell her—what she wants to know. That is all."

"It is quite enough!" I cried, passionately. "If only we could get her to go away. I am afraid of her."

We were standing by the gate, I held out my hand to him; he grasped it warmly.

"Remember my advice to your father," he said. "I shall do my utmost to prevent the girl from taking any extreme measures. Fortunately she considers herself under some obligation to me."

"You saved her life," I remarked, thoughtfully.

"Yes, I am sorry for it," he added, curtly. "Goodbye."

He turned away and I hurried into the house. Alice was nowhere about. I went softly into my father's room. He was dozing, and as I stood

over him and saw how pale and thin his face was, my heart grew sick and sorrowful. The tears stood in my eyes. After all, it was a noble face ; I longed to have that barrier broken down between us, to hear the truth from his own lips, and declare myself boldly on his side—even if it were the side of the outlaw and the sinner. As I stood there, he opened his eyes. They were dull and glazed.

"You are ill, father," I said, softly, "you will get worse if you will not have advice. Let me go and bring the doctor ?"

"You will do no such thing," he answered, firmly. "I am better—much better."

"You do not look it," I answered, doubtfully.

"Never mind, I am better, I feel stronger. Where is that girl ? Has she gone away ?"

I was glad he asked me the question outright. It was one step forward towards the more complete confidence which I so greatly desired. I shook my head.

"No, she has not gone away. She seems to have no idea of going. She has found a friend here."

"A friend ?"

"Yes; she has met Mr. Deville before. He saved her life in Switzerland."

He tossed about for a moment or two with closed eyes and frowning face.

"You have seen her again, then ?" he muttered.

"Yes; I met her this afternoon."

"Where?"

I hesitated. I had not wished to mention my visit to Adelaide Fortress, at any rate until he was stronger; but he saw my reluctance and forced me to answer him.

"At the Yellow House," I said, softly.

He gave a little gasp. At first I was afraid that he was going to be angry with me. As it chanced, the fact of my disobedience did not seem to occur to him.

"The Yellow House?" he repeated, quickly. "What was she doing there? What did she want?"

"I don't know what excuse she made for calling," I answered. "She seems to be going round the neighbourhood making inquiries for Philip Maltabar. She has quite made up her mind that he is the man who killed her brother. She says——"

"Yes——"

"That she is quite sure that he is here—somewhere—in hiding. She is like a ferret, she will not rest until she has found him."

He struck the bedclothes vigorously with his white, clenched hand.

"It is false! She will never find him. Philip Maltabar is dead."

"I wish that we could make her believe it," I

answered. "But we cannot. We shall never be able to."

"Why not?"

"Because it is not true. Philip Maltabar is not dead. She knows it."

"What do you mean?" he said hoarsely, raising himself from the pillows. "Who says that he is not dead? Who dares to say that Philip Maltabar still lives."

"I do!" I answered, firmly. "It is you who have called yourself Philip Maltabar in days that have gone by. It is you for whom she is looking."

He did not attempt to deny it. I had spoken decisively, with the air of one who knows. He fell back and half closed his eyes. "Does she suspect it?" he whispered. "Is that why she waited? Is that why she came here?"

"I do not think so," I answered. "Yet she certainly does believe that Philip Maltabar is somewhere here in hiding. She suspects me more than any one."

"You!—how you?"

"She has an idea that he is a friend of mine—that I am shielding him and trying to keep you away from her, lest she should learn the truth from you. That is what she thinks at present."

"Cannot you persuade her that there is no such person round here as Philip Maltabar?" he

murmured. "She can make her own inquiries, she can consult directories, the police, the residents. It ought not to be hard to convince her."

"It is impossible," I answered, shortly.

"Impossible! Why?"

"Because she has seen the photograph, in Adelaide Fortress's cabinet."

"What!"

The exclamation seemed to come from his parched, dry lips like a pistol-shot. His burning eyes were fixed upon me incredulously. I repeated my words.

"She saw his photograph at the Yellow House. It was in the secret aperture of a cabinet. She touched the spring unwittingly, and it flew open."

My father turned over and groaned.

"When Fate works like this, the end is not far off," he cried, in a broken voice. "God help us!"

I fell on my knees by the bedside, and took one of his white hands in mine.

"Father," I said, "I have asked you many questions which you have not answered. This one you must answer. I will not live here any longer in ignorance of it. I am your daughter, and there are some things which I have a right to know. Tell me why this woman has your likeness?"

"My likeness!" he said, fiercely. "Who dares say that it is my likeness?"

"It is your likeness, father," I answered. "I saw it, and there can be no mistake. She has admitted it, but she will tell me nothing."

He shook his head.

"It may happen that you will know some day," he answered, faintly, "but not from me—never from me."

I tightened my clasp upon his hands.

"Do not say that," I continued, firmly. "There is something binding you three together, yet keeping you all apart. You and Bruce Deville and Adelaide Fortress. What is it? A secret? Some common knowledge of an unhappy past? I alone am ignorant of it; I cannot bear it any longer. If you do not tell me what it is I must go away. I am not a child—I will know!"

He lay quite still and looked at me sorrowfully.

"There is a secret," he said, slowly, "but it is not mine to tell. Have patience, child, and some day you will understand. Only have patience."

"I have been patient long enough," I answered, bitterly. "I cannot be patient any longer. If I cannot be trusted with this secret now, I shall go away; Alice can take my place here. I have been at home so little, that you will not miss me. I will go back to Dresden. I have made up my mind."

He caught hold of my hands and held them with burning fingers.

"A little while," he pleaded, looking at me piteously. "Stay with me a little while longer. Very soon you may know, but not yet—not—yet——"

"Why not?"

"The secret is not mine alone. It is not for me to tell. Be patient, Kate! For God's sake, be patient!"

"I have been patient long enough," I murmured. "I shall go away. I can do no good here. I am not even trusted."

"A little longer," he pleaded. "Be patient a little longer. It is a terrible burden which has been placed on my shoulders. Help me to bear it. Stay with me."

"You have Alice——"

"Alice is good, but she is not strong. She is no help—and some day I may need help."

"I do not wish to leave you," I cried, with trembling lips. "I do not want to go away. I want to do all I can to help you—yet—imagine yourself in my place! I am groping about in the dark corners, I want the light."

He looked up at me with a faint, weary smile.

"Child," he said, "you are like your mother was. Won't you believe that I am helpless? If you really mean that you will leave me if I do not

tell you, well, you must go. Even if you go straight to that woman and tell her all that you know—even then my lips are sealed. This secret is not mine to tell. When you do know, it will not be I who shall tell you. All I can say is, go if you must, but for God's sake stay!"

His face was ineffably piteous. I looked at his worn, anxious face, and my heart grew soft. A lump rose up in my throat, and my eyes were dim. I stooped down and kissed him.

"I will stay," I whispered. "I will not ask you any more questions, and I will not leave whilst you need me—whilst you are ill."

His lips touched mine, and a little sob was caught in his throat. I looked into his face through the mist of my blinding tears, and I wondered. The light on his features was almost spiritual.

CHAPTER XVIII

FRIENDS

WHEN the thought first came to me I flung it away and trampled it under foot, I could almost have imagined I was going mad. I, jealous! What an ugly word! I jealous of that sallow-faced and black-eyed chit, who followed Bruce Deville about like his shadow, and seemed in a certain way to have laid claim to him as her own especial property. And above all things there was the man. What was Bruce Deville to me? What could he be to me? When the thought first crept into my mind I laughed out aloud; it was a genuine laugh of derision at first, but when I listened to its echoes I was frightened. There was something hard and unnatural about it—something which did not in any way suggest mirth. I turned upon myself with a certain fierceness. I, whose secret standard of manhood had always been so lofty, and to whom polish and culture had always seemed so absolutely essential, to think for a moment of such

a man as Bruce Deville. I thrust the idea steadily and scornfully away from me, it was ridiculous —humiliating. And, apart from the absurdity of such thoughts in connection with such a man, the darkness which had fallen like a sudden cloud upon our lives was surely great and engrossing enough to outweigh every other consideration. Only last night I had made that passionate effort to learn the truth from my father and failed. Scarcely an hour ago I had been with him again renewing his bandages and secretly burning the old ones—bearing my part in that little tragedy, in whose shadows I seemed to walk blindfolded.

It was a dark, windy morning, but I was too restless to stay in the house. I threw a cape over my shoulders and walked down the drive and out into the road, breathing the fresh air with a curious sense of relief. After the close atmosphere of the house it was like a strong, sweet tonic. I clambered up the green bank on the other side of the way and found myself suddenly face to face with Bruce Deville.

He started when he saw me, and for a moment we looked at one another in silence. I realised then how completely he had changed in my thoughts during the last few days. I no longer noticed the untidiness of his dress, or the superficial roughness of his demeanour. The firm locking of his fingers around mine in the greeting

which passed between us was somehow grateful to me. His brown eyes seemed soft and kindly, the harsh, cynical outlines of his features were all relaxed.

In silence he turned round and walked slowly by my side.

"Where is your friend this morning?" I asked.

His face grew moody.

"She has taken some rooms at Grant's farm," he answered. "She has gone over to the station now to get her luggage."

My heart sank. It was bad news.

"She is going to stay here, then?" I asked.

He nodded gloomily.

"She says so."

"You ought to feel flattered, at any rate," I remarked, maliciously.

He flushed an angry glance at me.

"What nonsense!" he exclaimed. "I beg your pardon, I ought not to have said that. Neither," he continued, after a moment's pause, "ought you to have said what you did."

I had stopped short at his first exclamation. I hesitated and then walked slowly on again. After all it was my fault.

"Perhaps I ought not," I answered. "At the same time I am not at all sure that she might not have given up this quest of hers if only you had not been here."

"I don't agree with you at all," he answered, firmly. "She would have given it up, I believe, if she had not seen that photograph in Adelaide's cabinet. It is that which makes her to decide to remain here."

"Has she any fresh suspicions?"

"I don't think so," he answered. "She believes that you and Adelaide Fortress are in league together. She believes that you both know where Philip Maltabar is. She also——" he continued, very slowly.

"Well?" I interrupted.

"She also seems to have an idea that you are keeping your father away from her so that she may not have an opportunity of asking him about Philip Maltabar. She has written to him, as you know, and the answer came back in a lady's handwriting. She does not believe that your father had that letter. She believes that you intercepted and answered it."

"She is stopping really, then, to see him?" I said.

"Chiefly, I am afraid."

Our eyes met for a moment, but we said nothing. I looked away through the trees to the glimmering front of the Yellow House, and asked him a question softly.

"She has not any further suspicion, then?"

"None, I am sure," he answered, confidently.

"It is you whom she believes to be shielding the man. She has a strong idea that he is a friend of yours; strangely enough she seems to have taken a violent dislike to you too. I believe that the very fact of that dislike blinds her a little."

"I agree with you as to the dislike. But why strangely?"

His firm lips parted a little. He looked at me with a smile.

"You do not appear to me," he said, slowly, "to be a person to be disliked."

I made a mental registration of that remark. It was the nearest approach to a compliment he had ever paid me.

"I am infinitely obliged," I said. "At the same time I think I can understand her dislike."

"You women are so quick at understanding one another," he remarked.

"And men are so slow," I replied. "Do you know I have an idea that if she were to come here now she would dislike me even more."

He looked at me without embarrassment, with a genuine desire for information in his face. He was evidently puzzled.

"Why?" he asked.

I laughed outright, and it did me good. He joined in it without the least idea of what I was laughing at.

"You men are so stupid!" I exclaimed. "You

either will not or cannot see things which are as simple as A B C."

"I admit it," he answered, good-humouredly. "But must you go in?"

I nodded. We had made a little circuit, and had reached the road again within a few yards of our gate.

"Yes, I am going to make something for my father. He is really ill, you know."

"Why don't you let your sister do it?" he said. "She looks a great deal more used to that sort of thing than you do."

"Thanks," I answered. "At the same time you are quite wrong. It is I who am the domestic one of the family."

He looked distinctly incredulous.

"You don't give one that idea at all," he said, forcibly.

"Well, you shall see," I told him. "Some day we will ask you to luncheon and cook it between us. I know whose productions you will prefer."

"So do I," he answered, fervently.

"You don't know my sister," I remarked.

"I don't want to," he answered, bluntly.

I raised my eyebrows.

"You are very rude," I told him.

"I beg your pardon. I did not mean to be. As a rule I detest women almost as much as they

detest me. I do not think that your sister would interest me."

"She does a great deal of good," I said. "She is managing the whole parish while my father is ill."

"I have no doubt she is very useful in her way," he answered, indifferently.

"She is much better tempered than I am," I added.

"I have no doubt about that," he answered, with a smile.

"But I don't think that she could have bandaged your dog's leg as well as I did," I said.

He looked at me with a sudden new thoughtfulness.

"That was the first time I spoke to you," he remarked. "It seems a long time ago."

"One measures time by events," I said.

"And that," he replied, quickly, "was a great event. I am not likely to forget it. I shall never forget it."

I laughed.

"Not such a great event after all as the coming of the heroine of your romance," I said. "How interesting it must have been to meet her again!"

"Rubbish!" he exclaimed, testily.

I shrugged my shoulders and turned towards the house.

"You are very rude," I declared. "I am going in."

He looked into my face and was reassured.

"I wish from the bottom of my heart that she had never come here," he groaned. "God knows I would send her away if I had the power."

"I only wish that you could," I answered, sadly. "She is like a bird of ill-omen. She looks at me out of those big black eyes as if she hated me. I believe I am getting to be afraid of her. Do you think that she will really stay here more than a day or two?"

He nodded his head gloomily.

"I believe so," he answered.

"You see what responsibility the rescuer of young maidens in distress incurs," I remarked, spitefully.

"I wish," he said, looking at me steadily, "that I had let that carriage go to the bottom of the precipice."

"They would have been killed!" I cried.

"Exactly," he remarked, grimly.

"You are very wicked to think of such a thing," I said.

"I am only living up to my reputation, then," he answered. "That is what my godmamma told you about me, isn't it?"

"I shall not stay with you a moment longer," I declared, ignoring the latter part of his sentence, and laying my hand upon the gate.

"Won't you—shake hands before you go?" he asked.

I hesitated. His request was gruff and his tone implied rather a command than a favour. But I looked up at him, and I saw that he was in earnest.

So I held out my hand and we parted friends.

CHAPTER XIX

A CORNER OF THE CURTAIN

A NOTE was brought in to me at luncheon time, addressed in a bold yet delicate feminine hand which was already becoming familiar. It was from Adelaide Fortress, and it consisted of a single line only—

"Will you come to me this afternoon?—A. F."

I went to see her without any hesitation. She was sitting alone in her room, and something in her greeting seemed to denote that she was not altogether at her ease. Yet she was glad to see me.

"Sit down, child," she said. "I have been thinking about you all day. I am glad that you came."

"Not very cheerful thoughts, then, I am afraid," I remarked, with a certain half-unconscious sympathy in my tone. For her face was white and drawn, as though she had spent a sleepless night and an anxious morning.

"Not very," she admitted. "I have been

thinking about you ever since you left me yesterday. I am sorry for you. I am sorry for all of us. It was an evil chance that brought that South American girl here."

"Was she born in South America?" I asked, with pointless curiosity.

"I do not know," she answered. "I should think so. She told me that she had spent most of her life there. A girl who dresses as she does here, and wears diamonds in the morning, must have come from some outlandish place. Her toilette is not for our benefit, however."

I looked up inquiringly. She continued, with a slight frown upon her face—

"She follows Bruce Deville about everywhere. I never saw anything so atrociously barefaced. If he were her husband she could not claim more from him. They have just gone by together now."

"What! this afternoon?" I asked.

"Not a quarter of an hour ago," she declared. "She was holding his arm, and looking up at him with her great black eyes every moment. Bah! such a woman gives one a bad taste in one's mouth."

"I wonder that Mr. Deville is not rude to her," I remarked. "He does not seem to me a man likely to be particularly amiable under the circumstances. I should not think he would be very easily annexed."

She smiled faintly.

"From his general behaviour one would not put him down as a willing squire of dames," she said; "but that girl is like a dog fawning for a bone. She will not let him alone. She waits about for him. She hates to have him out of her sight."

"Perhaps—perhaps it is a good thing. It might take her mind off other things," I suggested, softly.

"That is what I too am hoping," she admitted. "That is why I believe Bruce endures her. There is one thing only of which I am afraid."

"That is——" I asked.

"That she may send for a detective on her own account. Anything rather than that! The girl alone I think we might deal with."

"Mr. Deville must use all his influence. He must persuade her not to," I declared.

She assented.

"He will try. Yet for all her folly, so far as Bruce is concerned, she is not a perfect idiot. She knows that he is my friend—and yours—and she is desperately jealous. She will suspect his advice. She will not accept his bidding blindly. She is cunning. She will agree with him, and yet she will have her own way."

"He must be very firm," I said. "There must

be no detective come here. It would be the last straw. As it is, the anxiety is terrible enough."

We were silent, and we exchanged quick and furtive glances. Something in her sad face moved me almost to tears—it was strangely soft, so full of subtle and deep sympathy. Involuntarily I leaned across and held out my hands to her. She caught them in hers with a little passionate gesture. That moment brought us into a new connection. Henceforth we were on a different footing.

"My child!" she moaned. "My poor child! You have a terrible burden upon your young shoulders."

"The burden I could bear," I answered, "if only I had some knowledge of its meaning. You know, you could tell me if you would."

I crossed to her side and fell upon my knees, taking her hand in mine. She looked away into the fire and her face was as white as death.

"I cannot," she faltered, with trembling lips. "I cannot! Don't ask me!"

"Oh! but I must!" I cried, passionately. "It cannot hurt me so much to know as it does not to know. There is a secret between you and my father. You knew him as Philip Maltabar. Tell me what manner of man he was. Tell me why he has changed his name. Tell me what there was between him and——"

She had risen to her feet at my first words. She sat down again, now trembling in every limb.

"I cannot tell you any of these things," she moaned. "I am sorry I asked you to come. Go away! Please go away!"

But my mind was made up now, and the sight of her weakness only nerved me on. I stood up before her white and determined—brutally reckless as to her sufferings. I would know now, though I forced the words from between her white lips. She was a strong woman, but she had broken down—she was at my mercy.

"I will not go away," I said, doggedly. "You sent for me, and I am here. I will not go away until you have told me everything. I have a right to know, and I will know! You shall tell me!"

She threw her arms out towards me with a gesture half pathetic, half imploring. But I made no movement—my face was hard, and I had set my teeth together. Her hands fell into her lap. I did not touch them. She looked moodily into the fire. She sat there with fixed eyes, like a woman who sees a little drama in the red coals. My heart beat fast with excitement. I knew that in the war of our wills I had conquered. She was at my mercy. I was going to hear.

"Child," she said, slowly, and her voice seemed to belong to another woman, and to come from a great distance, "I will tell you a story. Listen!"

I leaned over towards her holding my breath. Now at last, then, I was to know. Yet even in those moments of intense excitement the outline of her face, with its curious white torpor, oppressed me. A chill fear crept into my blood.

She began.

"There was a girl, well educated, well bred, and clever. She was an orphan, and early in life it became necessary for her to earn her own living. There were several things which she could do a little, but only one well. She could write. So she became a journalist.

"It was an odd life for her, but for a time she was happy. She herself was possessed of original ideas. She was brought into touch and sympathy with the modern schools of thought and manners. She was admitted into a brilliant little coterie of artists and literary men and women whose views were daringly advanced, and who prided themselves in living up to all they professed. She herself developed opinions. I will not dwell upon them; I will only tell you in what they ended. She set herself against the marriage laws. At first she was very strong and very bitter. The majority of men she hated for their cruelty to her sex. The thought of

marriage disgusted her. Any ceremony in connection with it she looked upon as a farce. She had no religion in the ordinary sense of the word. She was brave and daring and confident. This was all before she knew what love was."

There was a silence, but I did not move my eyes from her face. Was she waiting for a word of encouragement from me, I wondered? If so, the silence must last for ever, for I was tongue-tied. She had created an atmosphere around her, and I could scarcely breathe. Presently she went on.

"The man came in time, of course. He was young, ardent, an enthusiast, fresh from college, with his feet on the threshold of life and eager for the struggle. He had a little money, and he was hesitating as to a profession. The girl was utterly free—she was her own mistress in every sense of the word. There was no constraint upon her movements, no conventionalities to observe, no one who could exercise over her even the slightest authority. The young man proposed marriage. The girl hesitated for a long while. Old ideas do not easily die, and she saw clearly, although not clearly enough, that if she sacrificed them to these new opinions of hers she must suffer, as the pioneer of all great social changes must

always suffer. Imperial dynasties and whole empires have been overthrown in a single day, but generations go to the changing of a single social law. Yet she told herself that if she were false to these tenets, which she had openly embraced and so often avowed, she must lose for ever her own self-esteem. The eyes of that little band of fellow-thinkers were upon her. It was a glorious opportunity. It was only for her to lead and many others would follow. She felt herself in a sense the apostle of those new doctrines in whose truth and purity she was a professed believer. That was how it all seemed to her.

"She told the man what her decision was. To do him justice, he combated her resolve fiercely. They parted, but it was only for a while. In such a struggle victory must rest with the woman. This was no exception to the general rule. The woman triumphed. . . .

"Their after history is not pleasant telling. The woman and the man were utterly unsuited for each other. The man was an enthusiast, almost a fanatic; the woman was cold, calculating, and matter-of-fact. The man suddenly determined to enter the Church. The woman was something between a pantheist and an agnostic with a fixed contempt of all creeds. The inevitable came to pass. She followed out

the logical sequence of her new principles, and left the man for another."

I suppose my face expressed a certain horror. How could I help it? I shrank a little back, and my eyes sought her, doubtfully. She turned upon me with a shade of fierceness on her white face.

"Oh, you are a swift judge!" she cried. "It is the young always who are cruel! It is the young always who have no mercy!"

I was shocked at the agony which seemed to have laid hold of her. That slight instinct of repulsion of which she had been so quick to notice the external signs in my face, seemed to have cut her like a knife. I moved swiftly to her side and dropped on my knees by her. I was ashamed of myself.

"Forgive me!" I pleaded, softly. "I am very ignorant. I believe that the woman did what seemed right to her. I was wrong to judge."

She bent her head. I took her fingers softly into mine. "You were that woman," I whispered.

She looked at me and half-rose from her chair, pushing me away from her.

"I was that woman," she moaned. "Your father was the man! You——"

I cried out, but she would not be interrupted.

"You," she added, wildly, "are my child—and his!"

CHAPTER XX

I AM THE VICTIM

I ROSE to my feet and stood apart from her. For a moment it was like the end of the world—like the end of all sensation. I was trembling in every limb. I believe that I gasped for breath. She sat and looked at me. When I spoke my voice seemed to come from a long distance. I did not recognise it. My sense of my own identity seemed confused.

"I am the victim, then—the unhappy victim of your miserable theories!" I cried.

"And you are—oh! my God!—you are the weak spot in a faith of which I was once an ardent disciple," she said, quietly. "You made all the difference. When you came I knew that I had sinned. All my arguments seemed suddenly weak and impotent when I strove to bring them to bear upon the face of your existence."

"You should have married him—at once," I cried.

"It was too late," she answered. "He had separated himself from me for ever by entering

a profession which I despised. He had entered the Church."

A horrible thought flashed into my mind.

"The other man," I whispered, with burning cheeks, for she was my mother.

She pointed out of the window—pointed along that narrow, hateful path which threaded the plantation.

"He is dead," she faltered. "He died—there!"

By this time my sense of horror was almost numbed. I could speak almost calmly. I felt as though I was standing on the world's edge. Nothing more mattered. The end had come.

"My father killed him," I said, almost calmly.

She looked away from me and fixed her eyes upon a particular spot in the carpet.

"Ask no questions, child," she said, sadly. "You know enough now. There were some things which it were wiser for you not to know."

"It is true," I cried, bitterly. "I have learnt enough for one afternoon—I have learnt enough to make me miserable for ever."

The woman covered her face with her hands. It were as though a spasm of inward pain had distorted her features. She was suffering terribly. Yet at that time I had no thoughts of any pity. I was merciless.

"You have learnt what has given you pain to hear, and what has given me much pain to confess," she said, slowly. "Confess," she repeated, slowly, and with unutterable bitterness. "That is a hateful word. I never foresaw the time when I should have to use it—to my own daughter! When one is young one is proud."

"You were short-sighted," I said, brutally.

Again she bowed her head and suffered. But what did I care? I was no heroine, and I never laid any claim to gentleness of disposition or great unselfishness. I was simply an ordinary human being, confronted with a great humiliation. My heart was closed to hers. The wrong to myself seemed to loom above everything else. The interruption that was at hand was perhaps merciful. I might have said things which afterwards I should have blushed to have remembered. But at that moment there came a sound of voices in the hall. Bruce Deville was there and Miss Berdenstein.

We both rose up. Her coming was a surprise to us. She entered by his side in some embarrassment. Mr. Deville proceeded to explain her presence.

"I met Miss Berdenstein here, and persuaded her to come in with me," he said, in a brusque, matter-of-fact tone. "I took the liberty of assuring her that you would be glad to see her."

"You did quite right," Adelaide Fortress said, calmly. "I am very glad to see her."

She greeted the girl kindly, but in a subdued manner. As for me, I shook hands with her coldly and under protest. I was very much surprised that she should have come here, even at the instigation of Bruce Deville.

"I hope we are not too late for tea," he remarked, glancing around the room.

Adelaide Fortress rang the bell. I smiled faintly at a certain irony in the thought called up by his question. I had shaken hands with the girl unwillingly. We were to be enemies. I was sure of that, and I preferred open warfare.

Tea was brought in, and a little general conversation was started, in which I took no part. Presently he came over to my side. The other two were talking, the girl was relating some of her South American experiences to Adelaide Fortress, who was leaning back amongst the shadows.

"What made you bring her here," I asked, softly.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Why not? It is better to be on friendly terms with her. We know then what she is going to do."

"So you appear to think." I remarked, with some emphasis. "You seem to be progressing wonderfully. I congratulate you."

He laughed in my face.

"Oh, she is not at all uninteresting," he declared. "If you had seen as much of her as I have the last few days you would find her enchanting."

I looked at her contemplatively. Her little person was almost lost in a huge sealskin coat, and her ungloved hands were blazing with diamonds. As she talked her white teeth (she had beautiful teeth) gleamed, and her black eyes flashed in their sallow setting. She was an odd-looking creature. Every now and then she darted swift, anxious glances towards us, once she paused and made a strenuous effort to overhear what we were saying. She need not have troubled herself. I barely heard what Bruce Deville was saying to me; my answers to him were purely mechanical. I was scarcely conscious whether it was indeed I who was sitting there within a few yards of that pale-faced, composed woman from whose lips only a few minutes ago I had heard that story which seemed to me yet like a dark, shadowy nightmare. The echoes of her passionate words seemed still lingering around the dimly lit room. Once or twice I raised my hand to my temples—my head was reeling. At last I could bear it no longer. The irony of small-talk was too bitter. A sense of suffocation came over me. I rose to my feet and made my excuses.

Scarcely a word passed between the woman whom I had learnt to know as Adelaide Fortress and myself. I touched her fingers, and they were as cold as ice. Then, with a single look at her dark eyes, I left the room.

Bruce Deville followed me out. The girl too had sprung up, and was making her hasty adieux. Before she could leave the room, however, Bruce Deville had reached my side.

"I am coming home with you, Miss Ffolliot," he said, in my ear.

I did not answer him. We were half-way down the path when Miss Berdenstein's shrill voice reached us.

"Mr. Deville!"

He paused. Involuntarily I stopped too.

"You will take me home, Mr. Deville, won't you?" she said. "I couldn't possibly find the way by myself; and, besides, I should be terrified to death. It is so dark. I should not have dreamed of staying so late if I had been alone."

He muttered something profane under his breath. I started to walk on.

"Won't you be here when I come back," he inquired, brusquely. "I was only going a few steps with Miss Ffolliot."

"I am quite ready to start now," she answered; "and I have said goodbye to Mrs. Fortress. I really don't see how I can stay any longer; and

I dare not go a step alone. It is almost pitch dark. Shall I walk home with Miss Ffolliot and you first ?"

I was almost out of hearing when she had finished, for at the commencement of her speech I had quickened my pace. When I clambered up the bank to reach the footpath I looked behind. They were walking along the road together—an oddly assorted couple. His shoulders were up—a bad sign—and he was taking long strides, to keep up with which she had almost to run, holding her skirts in both hands, and picking her way through the mud. Behind in the doorway of the Yellow House I saw a woman, pale and motionless, watching me with wistful, sorrowing eyes. But I turned my head and hurried away.

CHAPTER XXI

OUT OF DANGER

I WENT straight to my father's room, with only a very confused sense of what I wanted to say to him floating in my mind. But to my amazement, when I had softly opened the door and stood inside the room, he was not upon the bed, or on the couch. The room was empty. I passed through into the drawing-room with the same result. Then I retraced my steps down into the hall and saw that his hat was gone from the stand and also his overcoat.

I called to Alice, and she came out to me from our little drawing-room.

"Where is father?" I cried, breathlessly. "He is not upstairs!"

She drew me into the room. Her round face was very sober, and her eyes were grave.

"He left for London a quarter of an hour ago," she declared, impressively.

"Left for London!" I repeated, bewildered. "Why, he was scarcely well enough to stand. Did he dress himself?"

"He was very weak, but he seemed perfectly well able to take care of himself," she answered. "A telegram came for him about half an hour ago. I took it up to his room, and he opened and read it without remark. He asked where you were, but I could only tell him that you were out. Directly afterwards I heard him getting up, and I went to the door of his room to see if I could help him. He told me that I was to order the dog-cart, and that he was going away. I was too surprised to say a word."

My first impulse was unmistakable. It was a sense of great relief. Then I began to wonder what this Berdenstein girl would think. Would she connect it with her presence here? Would she think that he had gone away to avoid her? There was that risk, but it was no greater than the risk of her coming here some day and meeting him face to face. On the whole it was good news. It was a respite at any rate.

In the morning came a letter from him, dated simply London. He had been called away, he said, on some business, the details of which would not interest us, but it was a call which it would not have been his duty to have neglected. Immediately he had concluded it, he went on to say, he proposed to take a short vacation by the sea somewhere. Accordingly he had engaged a *locum tenens*, who was now on his way down, and

he would write us again as soon as he had definitely decided where to go.

Alice and I laid down the letter with varying thoughts. To her, ignorant of any reasons for conduct which was on the face of it somewhat eccentric, it brought some concern. With me it was different. I was at once relieved and glad. I had arrived at that acutely nervous and overwrought state when even a respite is welcome. The explanations between us were for the present necessarily postponed, and, at any rate, I could meet Olive Berdenstein now without trembling. It was the truth which I had to tell. My father was not here. I did not know where he was. She could come and search for him.

Yet that was a time of fierce disquiet with me. To settle down to any manner of work seemed impossible. Later in the day I went out into the garden, and the cool touch of the soft, damp wind upon my face tempted me past the line of trees which hemmed in our little demesne out into the muddy road and across to the broad expanse of green common which was really a part of the Deville home park. As I stood there, bareheaded, with the wind blowing through my hair and wrapping my skirts around me, I could see in the distance a man coming on horseback from the Court. I stood still and watched him. There was no mistaking man or horse—Bruce

Deville on his great chestnut—though they were half a mile away. Then, as I stood there waiting for him, a sudden darkness came into the faintly sunlit air, a poisoned darkness—the poison of a hideous thought. I turned away and plunged into the plantation on my left, flying along the narrow footpath as though the thought had taken to itself the shape of some loathsome beast and was indeed pursuing me, close on my heels. In less than five minutes I was standing breathless before Adelaide Fortress. She was looking white and ill. When she came into the room she threw across at me a glance which was almost supplicatory. Her firm lips trembled a little. Her eyes were soft and full of invisible tears.

"Is it bad news?" she faltered. "You have been running. Sit down."

I shook my head.

"No. Another question, that is all. Mr. Deville?"

She looked puzzled for a moment. Then she drew herself up and stood a little away from me. Her firm, dark eyebrows resolved themselves into a frown. Some subtle instinct, quick to fly backwards and forwards between us two, had helped her towards the meaning of my words.

"Mr. Bromley Deville, Mr. Deville's father, was my father's oldest friend," she said, slowly. "Bruce and I were children together, and except

that I, of course, was five years the elder, we were great friends. Mr. Bromley Deville was my father's executor, and since his death Bruce has taken his place."

A great relief had suddenly eased my heart. I drew a little breath, but she looked as if I had struck her a blow.

"How is your father?" she asked. "Is there any news?"

I nodded.

"He is better; he is gone away."

She started.

"Gone away? Where to?" she added, quickly.

"To London, and from there he is going to the sea," I told her. "He does not say where. He is sending a *locum tenens*. I do not think that he will return here at all. We want him to go straight to Eastminster."

She too seemed to share my relief, but my first thoughts were hers too.

"What will that girl say?"

"I cannot tell," I answered; "she may be suspicious. At any rate we have a reprieve."

"You have not spoken—to him yet."

"No; he had gone when I returned last night. I was glad of it."

We stood face to face looking at one another in silence. The faint colour was coming and going in her cheeks, and her hands were nervously

clasping the back of a chair. Where she stood the few rays of wintry sunlight which had found their way into the room were merciless to her. They showed up the little streaks of grey in her hair and the hollows in her cheeks. The lines of acute and bitter heart-pain were written into her worn face. My heart grew soft for the first time. She had suffered. Here was a broken life indeed. Her dark, weary eyes were raised eagerly to mine, yet I could not offer her what I knew so well she desired.

I was forced to speak. Her silence was charged with eloquent questioning.

"Won't you—give me a little time to realise what you have told me?" I said, hesitatingly. "I have grown so used to think that Alice's mother was mine—that she was dead—that I cannot realise this all at once. I don't want to be cruel, but one has instincts and feelings, and one can't always control them. I must wait."

So I went away, and in the Vicarage lane I met Bruce Deville walking towards me with his horse's bridle through his arm. He was carrying a fragrant bunch of violets, which he held out a little awkwardly.

"I don't know whether you will care for these," he said; "I don't know much about flowers myself. The gardener told me they were very

fine, so I thought you may as well have them as——"

"As let them spoil," I laughed. "Thank you very much, Mr. Deville. They are beautiful."

He frowned for a moment, and then, meeting my eye, laughed.

"I am afraid I am awfully clumsy," he said, shortly. "Let me tell you the truth. I went all through the houses to see if I could find anything fit to bring you, and I knew you preferred violets."

"It was very nice of you," I said; "but what about Olive Berdenstein? Doesn't she like violets?"

He opened his mouth, but I held up my hand and stopped him; he had so much the look of a man who is about to make a momentary lapse into profanity.

"Don't say anything rude, please. Where is she this morning?"

"I don't know," he answered, grimly. "Somewhere about, no doubt."

"It should be a lesson to you," I remarked, smiling up at him, "not to go about indulging in romantic adventures. They generally have a tiresome ending, you know. Do you always make such easy conquests, I wonder?"

He stopped short, and looked at me with darkened face.

"Is there any necessity," he asked, "for you to go out of your way to irritate and annoy me?"

I ignored him for a moment or two.

"She is very rich," I remarked. "Have you seen her diamonds?"

He rested his hand upon his horse and sprang into the saddle. From his great height there he looked down upon me with a dark frown and angry eyes.

"I will wish you good morning, Miss Ffolliot," he said. "My company is evidently distasteful to you."

I laughed at him, and laid my hand upon his horse's bridle. "I can assure you that it isn't," I declared. "I was very glad to see you indeed. Please get down, you have too much an advantage of me up there."

He got down at once, but his face had not altogether cleared.

"Look here, Miss Ffolliot," he said, looking at me steadfastly out of his keen, grey eyes, "I do not wish to have you talk to me in that way about that young woman. I do not think it is quite fair. I suppose it is what girls call chaff, but you will kindly remember that I am too stupid, if you like, always to know when you are in earnest and when you are not, so please don't do it. If I am with Miss Berdenstein at all please remember that

it is for your sake. I hate reminding you of it, but you make me."

"You are quite right, Mr. Deville," I said. "Please do not think that I am not grateful. Now let me tell you the news. My father has gone away."

"Gone away! Where? For how long?" he said, quickly.

"He has gone first to London," I answered; "where he was going to afterwards he did not seem absolutely sure himself. He spoke of going to the sea somewhere for a vacation. We are trying to arrange for him not to come back here at all. I should like him to go straight to Eastminster."

"It is a great relief," he said, promptly; "it was the very best thing he could do. He did not even tell you that he was going then?"

"I had no idea of it. He went quite suddenly while I was out. We had a letter from him this morning. I wonder—what she will say?"

"I do not think that she will trouble to go in search of him," he answered. "I do not think that her suspicions are really aroused in connection with your father. She is an odd, changeable sort of girl. I daresay she will give up this quest before long."

"I hope so," I answered. "It would be a great relief to have her go away."

There was a short silence between us. We were standing by the Vicarage gate, and my hand was upon the latch.

"I wonder," he said, abruptly, "whether you would not walk a little way with me. It is such a fine day, and you look a little pale."

I hesitated.

"But you are riding," I said.

"That is nothing," he answered, briskly. "Diana follows me like a lamb. We will walk along the avenue. I want you to see the elm trees at the top."

We started off at once. There was nothing very remarkable about that walk, and yet I have always thought of it as a very memorable one. It gave a distinct colour to certain new ideas of mine concerning my companion. We talked all the time, and that morning confirmed my altering impressions of him. Lady Naselton had spoken of him as rough and uncultured. He was neither. His lonely life and curious brusqueness were really only developed from mannerism into something more marked by a phase of that intellectual tiredness which most men ape but few feel. He had tried life, and it had disappointed him, but there was a good deal more of the cosmopolitan than the "yokel" in him.

For me it was a delightful time. He talked of many books and countries which had interested

me with a perfectly bewildering familiarity. The minutes flew along. I forgot all these troubles which had come so thick upon me as we walked side by side over the soft, spongy turf, sometimes knee-deep amongst the bracken, sometimes skirting clumps of faded heather. But our walk was not to terminate altogether without incident. As we turned the corner, and came again within sight of the Vicarage gate, we found ourselves face to face with Olive Berdenstein.

She stopped short when she saw us, and her face grew dark and angry. She was a strange-looking figure as she stood there in the middle of the lane waiting for us—a little over-dressed for Sunday morning parade in the Park. For a country walk her toilette was only laughable. The white lace of her skirt was soiled, and bedraggled with mud. One of her little French shoes had been cut through with a stone, and when we came in sight she was limping painfully. Her black eyes flashed upon us with a wicked fire. Her lips trembled. The look she darted upon me was full of malice. She was in a furious temper, and she had not the wit to hide it. It was to him she spoke first.

"You said that you would call for me—that we would walk together this morning," she said to him in a low, furious tone. "I waited for you one, two hours. Why did you not come?"

He answered her gruffly.

"I think that you must be mistaken," he said. "There was no arrangement. You asked me to call; I said I would if I could. As it happened, I could not; I had something else to do."

"Something else! Oh, yes! so I see," she answered, with a short, hysterical little laugh, and a glance of positive hatred at me. "Something more pleasant! I understand; we shall see. Miss Ffolliott, you are on your way home now, I presume. I will, with your very kind permission, accompany you. I wish to see your father. I will wait in your house until he can see me. If you deny me permission to enter, I will wait for the doctor. He shall tell me whether your father is not strong enough to answer me one single question, and if the doctor, too, be in your plot, and will not answer me reasonably, I will go to a magistrate at once. Oh! it will not be difficult. I will go to a magistrate. You see I am determined. If you would like to finish your amiable conversation, I will walk behind—or in front—whichever you like. Better in front, no doubt. Ha! ha! But I will come; I am determined."

She ceased breathless, her eyes on fire, her lips curled in a malicious smile. It was I on whom she had vented her passion. It was I who answered her.

"You can come with me to the Vicarage if you

like," I said, coldly; "but you will not find my father. He has gone away."

"Gone away!" she repeated, incredulously. For a moment she looked black.

"Gone away! Oh, indeed! That is good; that is very clever! You have arranged that very well. Yesterday he was too ill to see me—to answer one little question. To-day he is well enough to travel—he is gone away. Good! he has gone. I can follow."

She pursed up her lips and nodded her head at me vigorously. She was white with rage.

"You are welcome to do anything which seems reasonable to you," I answered, with at any rate a show of firmness. "Mr. Deville, I will say good afternoon. It is time I was at home."

He kept by my side with the obvious intention of seeing me to the gate; but as we passed the girl she took hold of his arm.

"No! I say no! You shall not leave me like this! You are treating me shamefully, Mr. Deville. Am I not right? That girl is hiding her father from me. She is helping him away that he may not tell me of the man who killed my brother! You will take my part; you have always said that you were sorry for me. Is every one to be my enemy? You too! It is justice that I want! That is all!"

He threw her delicately gloved hands off roughly.

"What nonsense!" he declared. "I have been sorry for you, I am sorry for you now; but what on earth is the good of persecuting Miss Ffolliot in this manner? Her father has been ill, and of course he has not desired to be bothered by strangers. You say you wanted to ask him a question. Be reasonable; he has answered it by letter. If you saw him, he could only repeat his answer. He has only been here for a few months. I have lived here all my life, and I tell you that there is no one by the name of Maltabar in the county."

"There was the photograph in that cabinet," she persisted—"within a few yards of the spot where he was killed. I know that Philip Maltabar hated him. I know that he would have killed him if he could."

"But what has all this to do with Mr. Ffolliot?" he persisted.

"Well, I begged him to see me," she urged, doggedly. "He is the clergyman of the parish, and he certainly ought to have seen me if I wished it. I don't understand why he should not. I want advice; and there are other things I wanted to see him about. I am sure that he was kept away from me."

"You are very silly indeed," Bruce Deville said, emphatically. "Surely his health was more important than the answering a question for you

which has already been answered by people in a much better position to know. As to advice, mine has always been at your service. I have been ready to do anything for you in reason."

"You have been very good," she said, with trembling lips, "but——"

"You must excuse me now," he interrupted, "I have something to say to Miss Ffolliot."

"I am going in," I answered. "Please do not come any further. Goodbye."

I nodded to him, the girl I ignored. If a glance could have killed me, I should have been a dead woman. I left them alone and went on up to the house. Somehow I did not envy her Mr. Deville's society for the next quarter of an hour.

CHAPTER XXII

AN UNHOLY COMPACT

AS may easily be imagined I had seen quite enough of Olive Berdenstein for one day at any rate, if not for a long time to come. But to my surprise, on that same afternoon, as I sat in our little drawing-room pretending to read a stupid novel, there was a timid ring at the bell, and she was shown into the room. She entered nervously, as though uncertain as to how I should receive her. I daresay she would not have been at all surprised if I had ordered her out again. If I had followed my first impulse I should certainly have done so. Wiser counsels prevailed, however, and although I did not offer her my hand, I suppressed my surprise at her coming, and motioned her to take a seat.

She was dressed much more quietly than I had yet seen her, in a plain brown dress, beautifully made. The element of incongruity was still there, however, for she wore a large Paris hat, and the little lace scarf at her throat was fastened with a great diamond.

She sat quite still, and I could see that she was very nervous. She kept her eyes away from my face as much as possible. When she began to talk she did so rapidly, and in a low tone.

"I suppose you are very surprised to see me, Miss Ffolliot, after this morning," she commenced, tentatively.

"Rather," I answered.

"I only made up my mind to come an hour ago. It was a sudden impulse. I started at once, or I should have changed my mind. I have come to make you an offer. It will sound very oddly to you, but you must not be angry. You must hear all that I have to say. I have thought it all out; it is very reasonable."

"You need not be afraid," I answered. "I shall certainly not mind listening—so long as you do not talk as you were talking this morning. I am quite willing to forget that if you do not remind me of it."

She fixed her black eyes upon me intently.

"Miss Ffolliot, have you ever loved any one—a man, I mean?"

I could not help starting, the question was so unexpected. She was watching me very keenly. Perhaps my colour was not altogether steady.

"I don't think so—not in the way you mean," I answered.

"I will make it clear. I do love some one. I

did not think that you would, you are too cold, you look too proud. Now I want to tell you. There is some one whom I love desperately—with my whole life. I want to tell you about it. Do you mind ?"

"Certainly not," I answered, softly. The change in her was wonderful. Her eyes were as soft as velvet ; there was a faint flush in her cheeks. But for those prominent teeth and the sharp outlines of her features she was almost beautiful.

"You remember, I have told you of our accident in Switzerland, and of Mr. Deville, and how gloriously he saved us. Oh, it was wonderful ! Even now when I think of it I feel excited."

I bowed my head slowly. I began to understand.

"Well, ever since that moment I have loved him," she said, simply. "I could not get him out of my mind. Oh ! it was magnificent to see him struggling there for our lives with those fierce, strong horses, beating them back, mastering them little by little, and all the time quite cool and silent ! But you have heard all about that, you do not want to hear the story again. Since that day I have never been able to think of any other man. I have had many offers, for I am rich, but I only laughed. The idea of marriage when he was in the world seemed wicked to me. It was because of him that I did not go back to South

America. It was because he was an Englishman that I kept on coming to England and looking for him in all those places where Englishmen are mostly to be found. I have never missed a season in London since, and yet I do not care for London. It was just because of the chance of finding him there. It is three years ago now, but I have never despaired. I think that I must be something of a fatalist. I have said to myself that in the end we must meet again, and now you see although we have been living in this out-of-the-way spot, the time has come. There is something wonderful about it. Don't you think so?"

I bowed my head. The eagerness of her question demanded an affirmative.

She sighed, softly, with an air of gentle satisfaction.

"That is what I tell myself," she continued. "It is wonderful. It must have been fate. I tell myself that, and it seems to me that fate which has brought us together could not now be so cruel as to interfere between us. And I love him, I love him so much!"

She paused a moment and looked at me almost with pity.

"You," she said, thoughtfully—"you will never know what it is to love as I love. You will never know the misery of it—or the happiness!"

I smiled faintly, and without mirth. Poor girl!

There was something terribly pathetic in her little confession. From the bottom of my heart I pitied her.

"And Mr. Deville?" I asked, softly.

Her face fell a little. The enthusiasm died away. Still she was hopeful.

"I am not sure," she said, looking away from me into the fire. "He is kind to me, and I think that he likes me—a little. He does not care for me as I do for him, of course," she added, sadly. "Why should he? I have done nothing for him, and he has done so much for me. It has been all on one side. I have had no chance yet; but I could help him a little. I am rich, very much richer than any one thinks, and they say that, although he has a great house and lands, that he is very poor, and that he has heavy debts. I could pay them all off," she declared, with a little note of triumph in her tone. "I have what would come in English money to nearly a million pounds. I should give it all to him, every penny. It would make him happy to pay off all his mortgages and old debts. Don't you think so?" she asked, anxiously.

"I daresay it might," I answered, gravely. "I should think it certainly would."

"And I love him so," she repeated, softly. "It would be such happiness to do this for him. Perhaps he would not love me very much just

yet, but when I had him all to myself it would come little by little. I could make it come; a woman can when she has a man all to herself. I am sure of it. I should have no fear at all."

Her eyes were very soft now and very bright. One forgot her sharp features and sallow cheeks. Poor girl! Then suddenly she looked away from the fire, and, rising, came over to my side.

"You are wondering why I have come to you to tell you my secret," she said. "I will tell you. I am afraid of you. You are so handsome, and I am plain. Oh! yes, I am—I know it. Never mind, I love him. But he does not know that, and he admires you. I see him look at you, and though he is kind to me, he does not look at me like that. And you—you do not care for him. I have watched you, and I am sure of it. You do not want him, do you?"

"No, I do not want him," I answered, but without looking at her.

"I know you don't. I want to promise you something. I believe that Philip Maltabar is somewhere in this neighbourhood, and I believe —no, I am sure—that in some way you are interested in him. Your father knows. That is why you have kept me from him. But never mind, I want to forget all that if you will just help me a little. I shall go away from here, presently. If I should come back again, and I should find

Philip Maltabar—well—never mind. I will forgive, and I will forget. God shall judge between those two—I will bury my desire for vengeance. This I swear—if you will help me a little."

"But how?" I asked, blankly. "What can I do?"

"You can help me simply by keeping away from Mr. Deville," she went on, hastily, a certain bluntness creeping into the manner of her expression as she reached the heart of her subject. "If you are not there, then he will be content with me, I can talk to him. I can make him understand by degrees. There! I suppose you think this is very unwomanly of me. It is unwomanly, it is despicable. I should detest another woman who did it. But I don't care—I want him so much. I love him better than life," she cried, with a little burst of passion. "I shall die if he does not care for me—not as I care for him, of course, but just a little—and more afterwards."

I leaned over and rested my hand upon hers. I felt a sudden kindness towards her. I don't know what instinct made me promise—I suppose it was pity. There was something so pathetic in her intense earnestness.

"Yes, I will do what you wish," I said, softly; "but——"

"But what? Are you making conditions?"

I shook my head.

"I make no conditions. Only I wanted to say this to you. Do you think it is wise to let yourself care so much for any one who after all may not care for you at all? It is like staking one's whole happiness upon a chance. It is a terrible risk."

She smiled at me faintly, and shook her head.

"Ah," she said, "it is so easy to see that you have never loved—that you do not know what love is. When you do you will not talk about letting one's self care. You might as well talk about letting one's self die when one is struggling upon a death-bed panting and gasping for life. It is the inevitable in love as in death. There is no choice."

She rose to her feet.

"Goodbye," she said. "I shall not trouble you any more. I am going to forget that such a person as Philip Maltabar ever lived."

I walked with her to the door. She looked down the dim road up the park wistfully.

"Perhaps," she said, "I may see him this afternoon. Was he coming to see you?"

"Certainly not. He does not visit here," I continued.

"Oh, he comes to see me," she said, quickly. "Perhaps it is not right—proper you call it—that he should. I do not care. I would like you to come and visit me—but—he might be there," she added, hesitatingly. Goodbye."

I touched her hand, and she went out with a little flush still lingering in her cheeks. I saw her look wistfully up and down the road, and then she picked up her skirts and took the muddy footpath across the park towards the Court. I turned away and went upstairs to my room.

Was it pity for her I wonder that brought the tears into my eyes? After all, I was only a woman.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE PLANTATION

I WAS determined to keep my word with Olive Berdenstein with absolute faithfulness. For nearly a week I stayed in the house except for a short walk in the early morning. Three times Bruce Deville called, and met with the same answer. Often I saw him riding slowly by and scanning the garden and looking up towards the house with an impatient look in his eyes and a dark frown upon his strong face. Once I saw him walking with Olive Berdenstein. She seemed to have caught him up, and have found him in no very pleasant temper. His shoulders were high, and he was walking so quickly that she had almost to run to keep up with him. I looked away with a sigh, and yet—what a heartless hypocrite I was. I found myself thinking with a curious satisfaction that his shoulders had been lower and his face very different when I had walked with him.

After nearly a week of solitude with only Alice's parish talk and mild speculations as to our future

at Eastminster to break the intolerable monotony of it, I could bear it no longer. I put on my hat one wet and windy afternoon and went down to the Yellow House. Adelaide Fortress was alone, writing at her desk, and when I entered we looked at one another for a moment without any greeting. It seemed to me that a few more grey hairs had mingled with the black—a little more wanness had crept into the delicate, intellectual face. But she greeted me cheerfully, without any shadow of reproach in her tone, although I knew that my absence had been a trouble to her.

"It is good of you to come and see me," she said. "Have you heard from your father?"

I nodded assent.

"We heard on Wednesday. He was leaving London that afternoon for the South Coast. He wrote very cheerfully, and said he felt better already."

"I am glad," she said, softly.

Then we were silent for a few moments. There was so much that we could both have said.

"Mr. Deville has been here inquiring for you," she said. "You have been invisible, he said. Have you been unwell?"

I shook my head. I wanted much to have told her of Olive Berdenstein's visit to me, and of my compact with her. For a moment I hesitated.

She noticed it, and doubtless drew her own conclusions.

"There has been nothing particular to keep me in," I said. "I simply felt that I wished to see no one. Don't you feel like that sometimes?"

"Very often," she assented. "I think the desire for solitude is common to all of us at times."

Then we were silent again. I knew quite well what she was waiting for from me, yet I was silent and troubled. Almost I wished that I had not come.

"You have thought over what I told you when you were here," she said, softly. "You have thought of it, of course."

"Yes," I answered. "How could I help it—how could I think of anything else?"

"You have remembered that you are my daughter," she added, with a little quiver in her tone.

"Yes."

I kept my eyes upon the carpet; she sighed.

"You are very hard," she said—"very hard."

"I do not think so," I answered. "I do not wish to be. It is not I who have made myself; I cannot control my instincts. I do not wish to say anything to you unless it comes from my heart."

"You are my daughter," she murmured, softly.

"It is true," I answered; "yet consider that I have only known it a few days. Do you think that I can feel—like that—towards you so soon? It is impossible. A few weeks ago we were strangers. I cannot forget that."

She winced a little at the word, but I repeated it.

"It may seem an odd thing to say, but so far at any rate as I was concerned, we were strangers. I do feel—differently towards you now of course. In time the rest will come, no doubt, but I should only be a hypocrite if I pretended more at present, you must see that; and," I continued, with a shade of bitterness in my tone, "there is the shame. One cannot forget that all at once."

She shrank back as though I had struck her a blow across the face. Unwittingly I knew that I had wounded her deeply. But how could I help it?

"The shame," she repeated in a low tone—"ay, the shame. That seems an odd word for me to hear. But it is a true one. I must learn to bear it. There is the shame! Oh, God! this is my punishment."

"You cannot deny it," I said. "How could you ever have thought of it in any other way? You deliberately chose to live with my father without marrying him. By your own admission there was not the faintest obstacle to your marriage.

You had the satisfaction of living up to your theories, I have to pay the penalty."

She bowed her head.

"It is true," she said.

She covered her face with her hands and there was a long silence between us. The clock in the room seemed suddenly to commence a louder ticking, outside; the yellow leaves came fluttering to the ground, and the wet wind went sighing through the tree-tops. The rain dashed against the steaming window-panes. I looked away from the bowed figure before me out into the desolate road, and found my thoughts suddenly slipping away from me. I wondered where Bruce Deville was, and Olive Berdenstein. Were they together and was she succeeding in her purpose? After all what did it matter to me, a poor, nameless girl, with a shadowed past and a blank future? I sighed, and looked back into the room. The sound of her voice broke the silence, which was becoming unbearable.

"I do not wish to excuse myself," she said, softly; "nothing can excuse me. But in those days, when I was young and enthusiastic, it seemed to me that I had but to lead and the world would follow me. I thought that by the time my children were grown up—if I had children—what is called illegitimacy would be no longer a thing to fear. You see I dwelt for a

little time in a fool's elysium. Believe me that I am sharing with you the punishment—nay, mine is the greater half, for I believe that my heart is broken."

I was moved to pity then and took her hands. But as yet the veil hung between us.

"I will believe that," I said, softly; "I shall try always to remember it. I will not think hardly of you in any way. The rest must come gradually I think—no, I am sure that it will come some day."

Her eyes were soft with gratitude. She held out her hands to me, and I gave her mine freely. We spoke no more upon that subject. But perhaps what I went on to say was almost as interesting to her. I had been thinking of it for some time, now it became inevitable.

"I had a purpose in coming to see you this afternoon," I said. "I want to talk to you about it. Do you mind?"

She shook her head. I continued almost immediately.

"I have come to ask for your advice," I said. "I want presently, when this trouble has passed over- and Olive Berdenstein has gone away, to leave home, to take up some work of my own. In short, I want to be independent, to take my life into my own hands and shape it myself."

She looked at me with a certain wistful thoughtfulness.

"Independent? Yes, you look like that," she said, softly.

"In any case I have no taste for a home life," I continued. "After what has passed I should find it unbearable. I want active work, and plenty of it."

"That," she said, with a sigh, "I can well understand. Yes, I know what you feel."

Not altogether, I thought to myself, with a little wan smile. She did not know everything.

"I should like to get right away from here," I continued. "I should like to go to London. I don't know exactly what work I am fitted for; I should find that out in time. I took a good degree at Heidelberg, but I should hate to be a governess. I thought perhaps you might be able to suggest something."

A sudden light had flashed into her face in the middle of my little speech. Evidently some thought had occurred to her which she hesitated to confide to me. When I had finished she looked at me half nervously, half doubtfully. She seemed to be on the point of suggesting something, yet she hesitated.

"If there is anything which has occurred to you," I begged her, "do not mind letting me hear it, at any rate. I am not afraid to work, and I shall not be very particular as to its exact nature

so long as it does not altogether deprive me of my liberty."

"I was wondering," she said, looking at me keenly, and with a faint colour in her cheeks—"I was wondering whether you would care to accept a post as my secretary. I am really in urgent want of one," she added, quickly; "I wrote out an advertisement to send to the *Guardian* last week."

"Your secretary?" I repeated, slowly.

"Yes; you would have to learn type-writing, and it would be dry work. But, on the other hand, you would have a good deal of time to yourself. You would be to a very large extent your own mistress."

I scarcely knew how to answer her, yet on the whole the idea was an attractive one to me. She saw me hesitate, but she saw also that it was by no means in displeasure. Before I could find anything to say she spoke again.

"At any rate, think of it," she suggested. "Don't decide all at once. You would live with me, of course, and I could give you sixty pounds a year. It does not seem much, but you would scarcely get more than that to start with at anything. Listen! Isn't that Mr. Deville?"

I sprang up and moved towards the door.

"I thought you told me that you were not expecting him to-day!" I exclaimed.

She looked at me in surprise.

"I was not expecting him—in fact, he told me that he was going to Mellborough. But does it matter? Don't you want to see him?"

"No!" I cried, breathlessly; "he is coming across the lawn. I am going out the other way. Goodbye."

"Why, what has poor Bruce done to offend you?" she cried, in some concern. "I thought you were getting such friends."

"He has not offended me," I answered, quickly. "Only I don't want to see him to-day. Goodbye."

I ran down the path, leaving her standing at the front door. I just saw the back of Bruce Deville's Norfolk coat as he entered the house by the French windows, and I hoped that I had escaped him. But before I was half-way through the little plantation I heard firm footsteps behind me and then a voice—

"Good afternoon, Miss Ffolliot!"

"Good afternoon, Mr. Deville," I answered, without looking round.

There was only room for one in the path. He passed me, taking a huge stride through the undergrowth, and turning round blocked the way.

"What is the matter?" he asked, quietly. "What have I done? Why are you trying to avoid me, like this?"

"I do not understand you, Mr. Deville," I answered, untruthfully, and with burning cheeks. "Be so good as to let me pass."

"Not till you tell me how I have contrived to offend you," he answered, bluntly. "I called three times at the Vicarage last week. You would not see me; you were at home. I found that out, but you would not see me. The answer was the same each time, and now this afternoon you have done your best to avoid me. I want to know why."

His tone and his attitude were alike uncompromising. I looked round in vain for some means of escape. It was not possible. After all this was no breach of my compact with the girl. I felt simply powerless.

"You have not offended me—not yet, at any rate." I said, with emphasis. "If you keep me standing here against my will another minute you most certainly will though. Please let me pass, I am in a hurry to get home."

"Very well, then, I will walk with you," he declared, standing on one side.

"There is no room," I remarked.

"We will see about that," he answered. He moved from in front of me, and then, leaving me the whole path, came crashing through the underwood and bracken by my side. I walked along swiftly, and he kept pace with me. After all he

seemed to have nothing to say. We had almost reached the Rectory gate before he opened his mouth.

"Then you will not tell me why you have avoided me the last few days, Miss Ffolliot. What have I done to lose your good opinion?"

There was a curious earnestness in his tone. I felt my cheeks flush. I might perhaps have answered him in a different manner, but suddenly my eyes were riveted on a moving figure coming along the road into which we had stepped. I looked at it steadily. It was Olive Berdenstein, plodding along through the thick mud with careful, mincing footsteps, her long, loose cape and waving hat, easily distinguishable even at that distance. I stepped forward hastily, and before he could stop me, had passed through the gate.

"Do not wait, please, Mr. Deville," I said, looking round at him. "There is a friend of yours coming round the lane. Go and meet her, and do not say anything about me."

He was very rude and very profane. He made use of an expression in connection with Olive Berdenstein which justified me in hurrying away.

I turned my back upon him and ran up the drive.

"Miss Ffolliot," he cried out, "one moment; I am very sorry. I apologise most abjectly."

I turned round and waved my hand. Anything to get rid of him.

"Very well! Go and meet Miss Berdenstein, please."

I am not at all sure that he did not repeat the offence. At any rate, he turned away, and a few moments later, from my bedroom window, I saw him greet her. They turned away together towards the path. I watched them with a little sigh.

CHAPTER XXIV

MY DILEMMA

IT seemed to me during the days that followed that I was confronted with a problem of more than ordinary complexity. I at any rate found it so. To live through childhood and girlhood wholly unconscious of the existence of a living mother, and then to find her like this, with such a history, was altogether a bewildering and unrealisable thing. Was I unnatural that I had not fallen into her arms? Ought I to have heard her story with sympathy, or at least, with simulated sympathy? At any rate I had not erred on the side of kindness towards her! I had made her suffer, and suffer very bitterly. Yet was not that inevitable? The seed was of her own sowing, not of mine. I was her unconscious agent. The inevitable requital of offences against the laws of social order had risen up against her in my person. If I had pretended an affection which I certainly had not felt, I must have figured as a hypocrite—

and she was not the woman to desire that. I liked her. I had been attracted towards her from the first. Doubtless that attraction, which was in itself intuitive, was due to the promptings of nature. In that case it would develop. It seemed to me that this offer of hers—to go to her with a definite post and definite duties would be the best of all opportunities for such development. I was strongly inclined to accept it. I was both lonely and unhappy. In a certain sense my education and long residence abroad had unfitted me for this sedentary (in a mental sense) and uneventful life. The events of the last few weeks had only increased my restlessness. There was something from which I desired almost frantically to escape, certain thoughts which I must do my utmost to drown. At all costs I desired to leave the place. It's environment had suddenly become stifling to me. The more I considered my mother's offer the more I felt inclined to accept it.

And accept it I did. Early one morning I walked down to the Yellow House, and in a very few words engaged myself as Mrs. Fortress's secretary. We were both of us careful, for opposite reasons, not to discuss the matter in any but a purely business-like spirit. Yet she could not altogether conceal the satisfaction which my decision certainly gave her.

"I only hope that you will not find the life too monotonous," she said. "There is a good deal of hard work to be done, of course, and mine is not altogether interesting labour."

"Hard work is just what I want," I assured her. "It will be strange at first, of course, but I do not mind the monotony of it. I want to escape from my thoughts. I feel as though I had been living through a nightmare here."

She looked at me with a soft light in her eyes.

"Poor child!" she murmured, "poor child!"

I was afraid that she was going to ask me questions which I could not well have answered, so I rose to my feet and turned away. Yet there was something soothing in her evident sympathy. She walked to the door with me.

"When shall you be ready to go to London with me?" she asked, upon the threshold.

"Any time," I answered, promptly. "There is nothing I desire so much as to leave here."

"I will write to have my little place put in order to-day," she said. "It will be ready for us in a week, I daresay. I think that I too shall be glad to leave here."

I walked quietly home through the shadowy plantation and across the little stretch of common. On my way upstairs to my room Mary, our little housemaid, interrupted me.

"There is a young lady in the drawing-room

waiting to see you, miss," she announced ; "she came directly after you went."

I retraced my steps slowly. Of course I knew who it was. I opened the door, and found her sitting close to the fire.

She rose at once to her feet, and looked at me a little defiantly. I greeted her as pleasantly as I could, but she was evidently in a bad humour. There was an awkward silence for a moment or two. I waited for her to explain her mission.

"I saw you with Mr. Deville the other day," she remarked at last.

I nodded.

"It is quite true. I did all that I could to avoid him. That was what I promised, you know."

"Is that the first time you have seen him since we made our arrangement ?" she asked.

"The first time," I answered.

"You have not been with him this afternoon ?" she asked, suspiciously.

"Certainly not," I assured her. "I have only been down to see Mrs. Fortress for a few minutes."

"He was not there ?"

"No."

She sighed and looked away from me into the fire, and when she spoke her voice was thick with rising sobs.

"He does not care for me. I cannot make him! My money does not seem to make any difference. He is too fierce and independent. I don't think that I shall ever be able to make him care."

I looked steadily down upon the carpet, and set my teeth firmly. It was ridiculous that my heart should be beating so fiercely.

"I'm sorry for you," I said, softly.

She fixed her black eyes upon me.

"You are sorry for me," she repeated. "Very good, you do not care for him yourself. But listen! I am afraid, I fear that he cares for you."

"You do not know that," I faltered. "You——"

"Bah!" she interrupted, scornfully. "I know. But you—there is some one else. That is our secret. Never mind, you do not care for him at any rate. You shall help me then. What do you say?"

"How can I help you?" I repeated. "Have I not already done all that I can by refusing to see him? What more can I do?"

"It was all a mistake—a stupid mistake, that idea of mine," she cried, passionately. "Men are such fools. I ought not to have tried to keep you apart. He has been grim and furious always because he could not see you. I have

had to suffer for it. It has been hateful. Oh, if you want to escape the greatest, the most hideous torture in this world," she cried, passionately, her thin voice quavering with nervous agitation, "pray to God that you may never love a man who cares nothing for you. It is unbearable! It is worse than hell! One is always humiliated, always in the dust."

I was very sorry for her, and she could not fail to see it.

"If you are so sure that he does not care for you—that he is not likely to care for you—would it not be better to go away and try to forget him?" I said. "It can only make you more miserable to stay here, if he is not kind to you."

She threw a curious glance at me. It was full of suspicion and full of malice.

"Oh, yes! of course you would advise me to go away," she exclaimed, spitefully. "You would give a good deal to be rid of me. I know. I wish——"

She leaned over a little nearer to me, and drew in her breath with a little hiss. Her eyes were fixed upon my face eagerly.

"You wish what?" I asked her, calmly.

"I wish that I understood you; I wish I knew what you were afraid of. What have you to do with Philip Maltabar? If he is not your lover,

who is he? If he is not your lover, what of Bruce Deville? Oh! if you have been fooling me!" she muttered, with glistening eyes.

"You are a little enigmatic," I said, coldly. "You seem to think that you have a right to know every detail of my private life."

"I want to know more, at any rate, than you will tell me," she answered; "yet there is just this for you to remember. I am one of those whose love is stronger than their hate. For my love's sake I have forgotten to hate. But it may be that my love is vain. Then I shall put it from me if I can—crush it even though my life dies with it. But I shall not forget to hate. I came here with a purpose. It has grown weak, but it may grow strong again. Do you understand me?"

"You mean in plain words that if you do not succeed with Mr. Deville, you will recommence your search for the man you call Philip Maltabar."

She nodded her head slowly; her keen eyes were seeking to read mine.

"You will do as you choose, of course," I answered; "as regards Mr. Deville, I can do no more for you than I have done."

She commenced twisting her fingers nervously together, and her eyes never left my face.

"I think that you could do more than you

have done," she said, meaningly. "You could do more if you would. That is why I am here. I have something to say to you about it."

"What is it?" I asked. "Better be plain with me. We have been talking riddles long enough."

"Oh, I will be plain enough," she declared, with a touch of blunt fierceness in her tone. "I believe that he cares for you, I believe that is why he will not think for a moment even of me. When I tell you that you know of course that I hate you."

"Oh, yes, I have known that for some time."

"I hate you!" she repeated, sullenly. "If you were to die I should be glad. If I had the means and the strength, I believe, I am sure that I would kill you myself."

I rose to my feet with a little shudder. She was terribly in earnest.

"I don't think, unless you have anything more to say, that it is a particularly pleasant interview for either of us," I remarked, with my hand upon the bell. But she stopped me.

"I have something else to propose," she declared. "You have said that you do not love him. Very well. Perhaps his not seeing you has irritated him and made him impatient. See him. Let him ask you—he will not need much encouragement—and refuse him. Answer him so that he cannot possibly make any mistake. Be rude to

him if you can. Perhaps then, if he knows that you are not to be moved, he will come to me. Do you understand ?"

"Oh, yes, I understand," I said, slowly; "I understand perfectly. There is only one thing you seem to forget. Your idea that Mr. Deville is interested in me is only a surmise. It is more than possible that you are altogether mistaken. He and I are almost strangers. We have not met a dozen times in our lives. He has never shown any inclination to make any sort of proposal to me; I should think it most unlikely that he should ever do so. Supposing that you were right, it would probably be months before he would mention it to me, and I am going away."

She smiled at me curiously. How I hated that smile, with its almost feline-like exhibition of glistening white teeth!

"He will propose to you if you will let him," she said, confidently. "If you are really ignorant of that fact, and of your conquest, I can assure you of it."

Suddenly she broke off and looked intently out of the window. Across the park in the distance a tall, familiar figure was coming rapidly towards us. She turned and faced me.

"He is coming here now," she declared. "I am going away. You stay here and see him. Perhaps he will ask you now. Can't you help

him on to it? Remember, the more decidedly you refuse him the safer is Philip Maltabar. Be rude. Laugh at him; tell him he is too rough, too coarse for you. That is what he thinks himself. Hurt his feelings—wound him. It will be the better for you. You are a woman, and you can do it. Listen! Do you want money? I am rich. You shall have—I will give you five—ten thousand pounds if—if—he ever asks me. Ten thousand pounds, and safety for Philip Maltabar. You understand!"

She glided out of the room with white, passionate face and gleaming eyes. Whither she went I did not know. I stood there waiting for my visitor.

CHAPTER XXV

A PROPOSAL

SHE left me alone in the room, and I stood there for a minute or two without moving. I heard his quick step on the gravel path outside and then his summons at the door. Mechanically I rang the bell and directed that he should be shown in to me.

The door was opened and closed. Then he was ushered in, our little maid-servant announcing him with a certain amount of unnecessary emphasis. She withdrew at once, and we were alone together. As he touched my hand I noticed that he was wearing a new suit of riding clothes, which became him very well, and a big bunch of violets in his buttonhole.

"So I have found you at last, have I?" he said, standing over me as though he feared I might even now try to escape. "Was it by your maid's mistake that I was allowed to come in this afternoon?"

"No," I answered; "I told her only a minute ago to show you in. I wanted to see you."

"You are extremely kind," he remarked, with a note of irony in his tone. "My patience was very nearly exhausted. I was beginning to wonder whether I should ever see you again."

"It was becoming just a question whether you would," I remarked. "We are closing the house up next week, I believe, and removing our 'Penates' to Eastminster. Alice is busy packing already, and so ought I to be."

"If that is a hint to me," he remarked, "I decline to take any notice of it. I have something to say to you. I have had to wait long enough for the opportunity."

"A little more than a week," I murmured.

"Never mind how long," he declared. "It has seemed like a year. Tell me—are you glad that you are going away?"

"I am very glad," I admitted. "I am glad that we are all going away. In any case I should not have stayed. Perhaps you have heard that I am going to London with Mrs. Fortress?"

Evidently he had not heard. He looked at me in amazement.

"With Mrs. Fortress?" he repeated. "Did you say you were going with her?"

"Yes; I am going to be her secretary. I thought that she might have told you."

He was looking rather grave; certainly not pleased.

"I do not see what you want to be any one's secretary for," he said, frowning. "You are going to leave here. Eastminster is a very pleasant place."

"I am afraid I should find it very dull," I answered. "I only admire cathedral cities from an external point of view. It would bore me horribly to have to live in one."

He stood there looking down at me in absolute silence. I raised my eyes and met his steadfast gaze. I knew then that what this girl had said was true. Then all of a sudden an unaccountable thing happened. The composure on which I prided myself deserted me. My eyes fell. I could not look at him, my cheeks were flushed; my heart commenced to beat fast; I was taken completely at a disadvantage. He seized the opportunity and commenced to speak.

"Perhaps," he said, slowly, "you have wondered what has made me so anxious to see you these last few days. I am glad to have an opportunity of telling you. I have been wanting to for some time."

I would have given a good deal to have been able to stop him, but I could not. I was powerless. I was as much embarrassed as the veriest schoolgirl. He went on—

"I want to ask you to be my wife, Miss Ffolliot. As you know," he added, with a sudden faint

flash of humour, "I am not apt with my tongue. I am afraid that I have allowed myself to rust in many ways. But if you will make the best of me you will make me very happy; for I think you know that I love you very much."

"No, no," I cried softly, "you must not say that. I did not wish any one to say that to me. I am not going to marry any one."

"Why not?" he asked, calmly.

"You ought not to ask me," I answered. "You know my story."

He laughed outright in kindly contempt. Then I knew I had made a great mistake. I should have given him some other reason. This one he would laugh to scorn. And because I had given it first he would deem it the chief one in my thoughts. Before I could stop him he had taken one of my hands and was smoothing it in his great brown palm. Somehow I forgot to draw it away.

"Did you ever seriously imagine that any such circumstance could make one iota of difference to any man who loved you?" he asked, in a mild wonder. "It is preposterous."

"It is not preposterous," I declared. "How can you say so? I am—nobody. I have not even a name."

"Will you please not talk nonsense?" he interrupted, firmly. "We both know quite well

in our hearts that such a circumstance as you allude to could not make the slightest difference—if you cared for me as I care for you. All I want to know is—do you care—a little? If you will give me—if you can—just a little share of your love, the rest will come. I should not be afraid to wait. I would take my chance. I have cared for you from the moment you first came here."

I looked up at him with wet eyes, but with a faint smile.

"You managed to conceal your sentiments admirably on our first meeting," I remarked.

He laughed. He was getting absolutely confident; and all this time I was drifting with a full knowledge of the shipwreck ahead.

"I was brutal," he said. "Somehow, do you know, you irritated me that morning? You looked so calm and self-possessed, and your very daintiness made me feel rough and coarse. It was like an awakening for me. Yet I loved you all the time."

"I am very sorry," I said, slowly.

He flashed a keen glance upon me. His eyes tried to force mine to meet them. I kept them away.

"You must not be sorry," he said, impetuously; "you must be glad."

But I shook my head.

"There is nothing to be glad about," I

cried, with a sob in my throat. "I do—I do—not——"

"Go on!" he pressed, relentlessly. "I do not care for you in that way," he repeated slowly. "Is that true? An hour ago I should have doubted you. But now—look at me and tell me so."

I nerved myself to a desperate effort. I looked up and met his stern, compelling gaze. My cheeks were pale. The words came slowly and with difficulty. But I told my lie well.

"I do not care for you. I could never think of marrying you."

He rose at once. The tears came to my eyes with a rush. He was very pale, and there was a look in his face which hurt me.

"Thank you," he said; "you are very explicit, and I have been a clumsy fool. But you might have stopped me before. Goodbye!"

I looked up, and the words were on my lips to call him back. For the moment I had forgotten Olive Berdenstein and my bargain with her. If he had been looking then it would have been all over. But already his back was vanishing through the door. I moved slowly to the window and watched him walk down the drive with head bent and footsteps less firm than usual. He crossed the road and took the footpath across the park which led up to the Court. In the

distance, a weird little figure in her waving cloak gleaming through the faint mist, I could see Olive Berdenstein crossing the common diagonally with the evident intention of intercepting him. I turned away from the window and laughed bitterly.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE EVIDENCE OF CIRCUMSTANCES

TWO very weary days dragged themselves by. We had no news whatever from my father. We did not even know where he was. Alice and I were hard at work packing, and already the house began to look bare and comfortless. All the rooms, except two were dismantled. We began to count the days before we might be able to move into Eastminster. No one came to call upon us. I saw nothing whatever either of Olive Berdenstein or of Bruce Deville.

But on the afternoon of the third day I saw them both from the window of my room. They came from the plantation leading down to the Yellow House and turned slowly upwards from the Court. The girl was much more fittingly dressed than usual. She was wearing a dark green tailor-made gown, and even from the distance at which I stood I could see that she was walking briskly, and that there was a new vivacity in her manner and carriage. Her usually sallow cheeks were touched with a faint and very

becoming tinge of pink. Bruce Deville too was leaning down towards her with a little more than his usual consideration. I watched them from the window, and there was a pain at my heart like the pain of death. Had she won already, I wondered? Was a man so easily to be deceived?

They had come from the Yellow House; he had been taking her to see Mrs. Fortress. An irresistible desire seized me. I hurried on my jacket and hat and walked down there.

The little maid-servant admitted me without hesitation. Mrs. Fortress was at home, she told me, and would no doubt see me, although she was very busy. Hearing my voice, she came out into the hall to meet me, and led me into her study.

"I am hard at work, you see," she remarked, pointing to a pile of papers littered all over her desk. "When do you think that you will be able to come into residence with me? I have had my little flat put in order, and I want to get there soon."

"I can come in about three weeks, I suppose," I said. "I shall be very glad to. We hope to move to Eastminster on Monday or Tuesday. I want to see my father again and to help them to settle down there. Afterwards I shall be quite free."

She nodded, and looked at me keenly for a moment or two.

"You are looking tired and worried," she said, sympathetically. "Has anything fresh happened?"

"Nothing."

She waited for a moment, but she did not pursue the subject. Still, I fancied that she was disappointed that I did not offer her my confidence.

"Mr. Bruce Deville has just been here, and Miss Berdenstein," she remarked.

I nodded.

"I saw them come through the plantation," I remarked. "I have not seen Miss Berdenstein for several days. Is she quite well?"

She looked at me, and commenced to sort some papers.

"Oh, yes, she is well enough. Bruce Deville rather puzzles me. He is in a very odd mood. I have never seen him more attentive to any one than he is to that girl, and yet all the time there was a sort of brutal cynicism about his behaviour, and when I asked him to stay and talk to me he would not. I wonder have you——"

She looked up into my face and stopped short. There was a little pause."

"Won't you tell me about it?" she said, wistfully. "Not unless you like, of course.

"There is nothing much to tell," I answered, controlling my voice with a desperate effort.

"Mr. Deville asked me something. I was obliged to say no. He is consoling himself admirably."

She sighed, and looked at me thoughtfully. That note of bitterness in my tone had betrayed me.

"I am sorry," she said. "Bruce Deville is not exactly a woman's man, and he has many faults, but he is a fine fellow. He is a world too good anyhow to throw himself away upon that miserable chit of a girl."

That was exactly my own idea. I did not tell her so, however.

"She is very rich," I remarked. "She can free his estates and put him in his right position again."

"That is only a trifle," she declared. "Besides, he is not so poor as some people think. He could live differently now, only he is afraid that he would have to entertain and be entertained. He makes his poverty an excuse for a great many things, but as a matter of fact he is not nearly so embarrassed as people believe. The truth is he detests society."

"I do not blame him," I answered. "Society is detestable."

"At any rate, I cannot bring myself to believe that he is thinking seriously about that girl," she continued, anxiously. "I should hate to think so!"

"Men are enigmas," I remarked. "It is pre-

cisely the unexpected which one has always to expect from them."

"That is what they say about us," she said.

I nodded.

"Don't you think that most of the things that men say of women are more true about themselves? It seems so to me, at any rate."

She rose up suddenly, and came and stood over me. She held out her hands, and I gave her mine. My eyes were dim. It was strange to me to find any one who understood.

"Would you like to go away with me to-morrow—right away from here?" she asked, softly.

"Where to?" I asked, with sudden joy.

"To London. Everything is ready for us there; we only need to send a telegram. I think —perhaps—it would be good for you."

"I am sure of it," I answered, quickly. "I have a sort of fancy that if I stay here I shall go mad. The place is hateful."

"Poor child!" she said, soothingly. "You must make up your mind and come."

"I would not hesitate," I answered, "if only I could feel certain that—he would not come back here before Olive Berdenstein leaves."

"We can make sure of it," she said. "Write and tell him that it would not be safe; he ought not to come."

Our eyes met, and I felt impelled to ask her a sudden question.

"Do you believe that he killed her brother?"

She looked at me with blanched cheeks and glanced half-fearfully around. From where I sat I could see the black bending branches from that little fir plantation where he had been found.

"What else is there to believe?" she asked. "I heard him myself one awful day—it was long ago, but it seems only like yesterday—I heard him threaten to kill him if ever he found him near again. It was outside the gate there that they met, and then—in the church you remember——"

I held out my hand and stopped her. The moaning of the wind outside seemed like the last cry of that dying man. It was too horrible.

"I cannot stay here," I cried. "I will go with you whenever you are ready."

A light flashed across her face. She drew me to her and kissed my forehead.

"I am sure it would be best," she said. "I too loathe this place! I shall never live here any more. To-morrow——"

"To-morrow," I interrupted, "we will go away."

She had heard from him that morning, she said. He was at Ventnor, and much improved in health. She was expecting him home in a week.

But in the afternoon of that same day a strange thing happened. My mother was compelled to go to the East End of London, and at the last moment insisted upon my going with her. She was on the committee in connection with the proposed erection of some improved dwelling-houses somewhere in Whitechapel, and the meeting was to be held in a schoolroom in the Commercial Road. I was looking pale, she said, and the drive there would do me good, so I went with her, lacking energy to refuse, and sat in the carriage whilst she went in to the meeting—a proceeding which I very soon began to regret.

The surroundings and environment of the place were in every way depressing. The carriage had been drawn up at the corner of two great thoroughfares—avenues through which flows the dark tide of all that is worst and most wretched of London poverty. For a few minutes I watched the people. It was horrible, yet in a sense fascinating. But when the first novelty had worn off the whole thing suddenly sickened me. I removed my eyes from the pavement with a shudder. I would watch the people no longer. Nothing, I told myself, should induce me to look again upon that stream of brutal and unsexed men and

women. I kept my eyes steadfastly fixed upon the rug at my feet. And then a strange thing happened to me. Against my will a moment came when I was forced to raise my eyes. A man hurrying past the carriage had half halted upon the pavement only a foot or two away from me. As I looked up our eyes met. He was dressed in a suit of rusty black, and he had a hankerchief tied closely around his neck in lieu of collar. He was wearing a flannel shirt and no tie. His whole appearance, so far as dress was concerned, was miserably in accord with the shabbiness of his surroundings. Yet from underneath his battered hat a pair of piercing eyes met mine, and a delicate mouth quivered for a moment with a curious and familiar emotion. I sprang from my seat and struggled frantically with the fastening of the carriage door. Disguise was all in vain, so far as I was concerned. It was my father who stood there looking at me. I pushed the carriage door open at last and sprang out upon the pavement. I was a minute too late—already he was a vanishing figure. At the corner of a squalid little court he turned round and held out one hand threateningly towards me. I paused involuntarily. The gesture was one which it was hard to disobey. Yet I think that I most surely should have disobeyed it, but for the fact that during my momentary hesitation he had dis-

appeared. I hurried forward a few steps. There was no sign of him anywhere. He had passed down some steps and vanished in a wilderness of small courts; to pursue him was hopeless. Already a little crowd of people were gazing at me boldly and curiously. I turned round and stepped back into the carriage.

I waited in an agony of impatience until my mother came out. Then I told her with trembling voice what had happened.

Her face grew paler as she listened, but I could see that she was inclined to doubt my story.

"It could not have been your father," she exclaimed, her voice shaking with agitation. "You must have been mistaken."

I shook my head sadly. There was no possibility of any mistake so far as I was concerned.

"It was my father. That girl has broken her word," I cried, bitterly. "She has seen him and —she knows. He is hiding from her!"

We drove straight to the telegraph office. My mother wrote out a message to Mr. Deville. I, too, sent one to Olive. Then we drove back to our rooms. There was nothing to be done but wait.

It was six o'clock before the first answer came back. It was from Mr. Bruce Deville. I tore it open and read it.

"You must be mistaken. Can answer for it

she has taken no steps. She is still here. Mr. Ffolliot has not returned. Impossible for them to have met."

The pink paper fluttered to the ground at our feet. I tore open the second one; it was from Olive Berdenstein—

"Do not understand you. I have no intention of breaking our compact."

We read them both over again carefully. Then we looked at one another.

"He must have taken fright needlessly," I said, in a low tone.

"You are still certain, then, that it was he?" she asked.

"Absolutely!" I answered. "If only we could find him! In a week it will be too late."

"Too late!" she repeated. "What do you mean?"

"The ceremony at Eastminster is on Sunday week. He was to have been there at least a week before. I am afraid that he will not go at all now."

"We must act at once," my mother declared, firmly. "I know exactly where you saw him. I will go there at once."

"We will go together," I cried. "I shall be ready in a minute."

She shook her head.

"I must go alone," she said, quietly. "You

would only be in the way. I know the neighbourhood and the people. They will tell me more if I am alone."

She was away until midnight. When at last she returned I saw at once by her face that she had been unsuccessful.

"There is no clue, then?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"None."

We sat and looked at one another in silence.

"To-morrow," she said, "I will try again."

But to-morrow came and went, and we were still hopelessly in the dark. On the morning of the third day we were in despair. Then, as we sat over our breakfast, almost in despair, a letter was brought to me. It was from Alice, and enclosed in it was one from my father.

"You seem," she wrote, "to have been very anxious about father lately, so I thought you would like to read this letter from him. We are almost straight here now, but it has been very hard work, and I have missed you very much. . . ."

There was more of the same sort, but I did not stop to read it. I passed it on to my mother, and eagerly read the few lines from my father. His letter was dated three days ago—the very day of my meeting with him in the Commercial Road, and the postmark was Ventnor.

"My dear child," he commenced, "I am better and shall return for certain on Monday. The air here is delightful, and I have felt myself growing stronger every day. If you see the Bishop tell him that you have heard from me. My love to Kate, if you are writing. I hope that she will be coming down for next week. There is a good deal for me to say to her.—Your affectionate father, HORACE FFOLLIOT."

My mother read both letters, and then looked up at me with a great relief in her face.

"After all you see you must have been mistaken," she exclaimed. "There can be no doubt about it."

And I said no more, but one thing was as certain as my life itself—the man who had waved me back from following him along the pavements of the Commercial Road was most surely no other man than my father.

CHAPTER XXVIII

EASTMINSTER

THE days that followed were, in a sense, like the calm before the threatened storm. As the date of my father's promised return to Eastminster drew near, every day I expected to hear from Alice that he had abandoned his purpose, and that Northshire would see him no more. But no such letter came. On the contrary, when news did come it was news which astonished me.

"You will be glad to hear," Alice wrote, "that father came back last night looking better, although rather thin. He did not seem to have understood that you were already with Mrs. Fortress, and I think he was disappointed not to see you. At the same time, considering that you have acted without consulting him in any way, and that there is certainly some room for doubt as to the wisdom of the step you have taken, I think that he takes your absence very well. He wants you to come down in a week for a day or two. No doubt you will be able

to manage this. You must stay for a Sunday. Father preached last evening, and there was quite a sensation. Lady Bolton has been so kind. She says that the Bishop is continually congratulating himself upon having found father in the diocese. I have not seen either Mr. Deville or Miss Berdenstein since I left the Vicarage. As you can imagine I have been terribly busy. The house here is simply delightful. The old oak is priceless, and there are such quaint little nooks and corners everywhere. Do come at once. Ever your loving sister, ALICE."

I passed the letter across to my mother, and when she had finished it she looked with a smile into my still troubled face.

"That proves finally that you were wrong," she remarked, quietly. "I suppose you have no more doubts about it?"

I shook my head. I did not commit myself to speech.

"I suppose I must have been mistaken," I said. "It was a wonderful likeness."

"He wants to see you," she continued, looking wistfully across at me. "You know what that means?"

"Yes," I answered. "I think I know what that means."

"He will try to make you leave me," she went on. "Perhaps he will be right. At any rate, he

will think that he is right. It will be a struggle for you, child. He has a strong will."

"I know it," I answered; "but I have made up my mind. Nothing will induce me to change it—nothing, at any rate, that my father will be able to say. Another month like the last would kill me. Besides, I do not think that I was meant for a clergyman's daughter—I am too restless. I want a different sort of life. No, you need not fear. I shall come back to you."

"If I thought that you would not," she said, "I should be very unhappy. I have made so many plans for the future—our future."

I crossed the room to the side of her chair and threw myself down upon my knees, with my head in her lap. She passed her arms around me, and I had no need to say a single word. She understood.

I think as I walked down the little main street of Eastminster that sunny morning I knew that the crisis in these strange events was fast drawing near. The calm of the last few days had been too complete. Almost I could have persuaded myself that the events of the last month or two had been a dream. No one could possibly have imagined that the thunder-clouds of tragedy were hovering over that old-fashioned, almost cloistral, dwelling-house lying in the very shadows of the cathedral.

My father was, beyond a doubt, perfectly at his ease, calm and dignified, and wearing his new honours with a wonderful grace and dignity. Alice was perfectly happy in the new atmosphere of a cathedral town. To all appearance they were a model father and daughter, settling down for a very happy and uneventful life. But to me there was something unnatural alike in my father's apparent freedom from all anxiety and in Alice's complacent ignorance. I could not breathe freely in the room whilst they talked with interest about their new surroundings and the increased possibilities of their new life. But what troubled me most perhaps was that my father absolutely declined to discuss with me anything connected with the past. On every occasion when I sought to lead up to it he had at once checked me peremptorily. Nor would he suffer me to allude in any way to my new life. Once, when I opened my lips to frame some suggestive sentence, I caught a light in his eyes before which I was dumb. Gradually I began to realise what it meant. By leaving him for my mother, I had virtually declared myself on her side. All that I had been before went for nothing. In his eyes I was no longer his daughter. Whatever fears he had he kept them from me. I should no longer have even those tragic glimpses into his inner life. My anxieties, indeed, were to be

lessened as my knowledge was to be less. Yet that was a thought which brought me little consolation. I felt as though I had deserted a brave man.

I had come for a walk to escape from it, and at the end of the little line of shops issuing from the broad archway of the old-fashioned hotel I came face to face with Bruce Deville. He was carefully, even immaculately, dressed in riding-clothes, and he was carrying himself with a new ease and dignity. Directly he saw me he stopped short and held out his hand.

"What fortune!" he exclaimed, forgetting for the moment, or appearing to forget, to release my hand. "I heard that you were down, and I was going to call. It is much pleasanter to meet you though!"

I was miserably and unaccountably nervous. Our old relative positions seemed suddenly to have become reversed.

"We will go back, then," I said; "it is only a moment's walk to the close."

He laid his hand upon the sleeve of my jacket and checked me.

"No! it is you whom I wanted to see. I may not be able to talk to you alone at your house, and, besides, your father might not allow me to enter it. Will you come for a short walk with me? There is a way through the fields a little higher up. I have something to say to you."

I suffered myself to be easily persuaded. There was something positively masterful about the firm ring of his voice, the strong touch of his fingers, the level, yet anxious glance of his keen, grey eyes. Anyhow I went with him. He appeared to know the way perfectly. Soon we were walking slowly along a country road, and Eastminster lay in the valley behind us.

"Where is Miss Berdenstein?" I asked him.

He looked at me with a gleam of something in his eyes which puzzled me. It was half kindly, half humorous. Then in an instant I understood. The girl had told him. Something decided had happened then between them. Perhaps she had told him everything.

"I believe," he answered, "that Miss Berdenstein has gone to London. Don't you feel that you owe me a very humble plea for forgiveness?"

I looked at him cautiously.

"Why?"

His lips relaxed a little. He was half smiling.

"Did you not make a deliberate plot against me in conjunction with Miss Berdenstein?"

"I am not sure that I understand you," I answered. "I certainly did not originate any plot against you."

"Nay, but you fell in with it. I know all about it, so you may just as well confess. Miss Berdenstein was to leave off making inconvenient

inquiries about Philip Maltabar, and you were to be as rude to me as you could. Wasn't that something like the arrangement? You see I know all about it. I have had the benefit of a full confession."

"If you know," I remarked, "you do not need to ask me."

"That is quite true," he answered, opening a gate and motioning me to precede him. "But at the same time I thought that it would be rather—well, piquant to hear the details from you."

"You are very ungenerous," I said, coldly.

"I hope not," he answered. "Do you know I only discovered this diabolical affair yesterday, and——"

"Mr. Deville!"

He turned round and looked at me. I was standing in the middle of the path, and I daresay I looked as angry as I felt.

"I will tell you the truth," I said. "Afterwards, if you allude to the matter at all I shall go away at once. The girl has it in her power, as you know, to do us terrible harm. She, of her own accord, offered to forego that power for ever—although she is quite ignorant of its extent—if I would not see or talk with you. She was a little fool to make the offer, of course, but I should have been more foolish still if I had not accepted it. She imagined that our relative positions were

different. However, that is of no consequence, of course. I made the bargain, and I kept my part of it. I avoided you, and I left the neighbourhood. You have reminded me that I am not keeping to the letter of my agreement in being here with you. I should prefer your leaving me, as I can find my way home quite well alone."

"It is unnecessary," he said. "The agreement is off. Miss Berdenstein and I have had an understanding."

"You are engaged, then?" I faltered.

"Well, no," he said, coolly, "I should perhaps have said a misunderstanding."

"Tell me the truth at once," I demanded.

"I am most anxious to do so," he answered. "She was, as you remarked, a little fool. She became sentimental, and I laughed at her. She became worse, and I put her right. That was last night. She was silly enough to get into a passion, and from her incoherencies I gathered the reason why you were so unapproachable those last few days at the Vicarage. That is why I got up at six o'clock this morning and rode into Eastminster."

"Have you come here this morning?" I asked.

"Yes, it's only thirty miles," he answered, coolly. "I wanted to see you."

I was silent for a few moments. This was news indeed. What might come of it I scarcely dared

to think. A whole torrent of surmises came flooding in upon me.

"Where is she?" I asked.

"In London, I should think, by this time," he answered.

I drew a long breath of relief. To be rid of her for a time would be happiness.

"I believe," he continued, "that she intends to return to Paris."

After all it was perhaps the best thing that could happen; if she had been in earnest—and I knew that she had been in earnest—she would hate England now. At any rate she would not want to come back again just yet. My face cleared. After all it was good news.

"She has gone—out of our lives, I hope," he said, quietly, "and in her hysterics she left one little legacy behind for me—and that is hope. I know that I am not half good enough for you," he said, with an odd little tremble in his tone, "but you have only seen the worst of me. Do you think that you could care for me a little? Would you try?"

Then when I should have been strong I was pitiably weak. I struggled for words in despair. He was so calm, so strong, so confident. How was I to stand against him?

"It is impossible," I said; "you know who I am. I shall never marry."

He laughed at me scornfully.

"If that is all," he said, taking my hands suddenly into his, "you shall not leave me until you have promised."

"But—I——"

Then he was very bold, and I should have been very angry, but was not. He looked coolly round, and finding that there was no one in sight, he drew me to him and kissed me. His arms were like steel bars around me, I could not possibly escape. After that there were no words which I could say. I was amazed at myself, but I was very happy. The twilight was falling upon the city when we walked once more through the little streets, and my veil was closely drawn to hide my wet eyes.

My lover—I dared to call him that at last—was coming home with me, and for a few brief moments my footsteps seemed to be falling upon air.

I allowed myself the luxury of forgetfulness; the load of anxiety which had seemed crushing had suddenly rolled away. But at the entrance to the close a little dark figure met us face to face, and my blood ran cold in my veins, for she lifted her veil, and my dream of happiness vanished into thin air. Her face was like the face of an evil spirit, yet she would have passed me without a word, but that I held out my hand and stopped her.

"What are you doing here?" I asked. "What do you want?"

She smiled at me with the malice of a fiend.

"It was a little call," she said, "which I was paying upon your father. He was unfortunately not at home. No matter, I shall call again; I shall call again and again until I see him. I am in no hurry to leave. Eastminster is such an interesting place!"

Then my heart died away within me, and the light of my sudden happiness grew dim. She looked from one to the other of us, and her eyes were lit with a new fury. Some subtle instinct seemed to guide her to the truth.

"May I congratulate you both?" she asked, with a sneer in her tone. "A little sudden, isn't it?"

We did not answer. I had no words, and Bruce remained grimly and contemptuously silent. She gathered up her skirts, and her eyes flashed an evil light upon us.

"After all," she exclaimed, "it is an admirable arrangement! How happy you both look! Don't let me keep you! I shall call later on this evening."

She flitted away like a dark shadow and passed underneath the stone archway out of the close. I covered my face with my hands and moaned. It had come at last, then. All that I had done had been useless. I was face to face with despair.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE BREAKING OF THE STORM

IT was at evensong in the great cathedral that she tasted the firstfruits of her triumph. During the earlier portion of the service the shadows had half enveloped the huge body of the building, and the white faces of the congregation had been only dimly visible to us from where we sat in one of the high side pews. But when my father ascended the steps into the pulpit, and stood for a minute looking downwards with the light from a little semi-circle of candles thrown upon his pale, delicate face, I caught the sound of a sharp, smothered cry from a seat close to ours. With a little shiver of dread I looked around. She had half risen from her seat, and was leaning over the front of the pew. Her eyes were riveted upon him, and her thin, sallow face was white with sudden excitement. I saw him look up, and their eyes met for one terrible moment. He did not flinch or falter. But for the slightly prolonged resting of his eyes upon her eager, strained face

he took no more notice of her than of any other member of the congregation. I alone knew that her challenge had been met and answered, and it was my hard fate to sit there and suffer in silence.

There was no mark of nervousness or weakness of any sort in the sermon he preached. He seemed to be speaking with a consciousness perhaps that it might be for the last time, and with a deliberate effort that some part of those delicately chosen sentences might leave an everlasting mark behind him. Already his fame as a preacher was spreading, and many of the townspeople were there, attracted by his presence. They listened with a rare and fervid attention. As for me, it seemed that I should never altogether lose the memory of that low, musical voice, never once raised above its ordinary pitch, yet with every word penetrating softly and clearly into the furthermost corner of the great building. There was a certain wistfulness in his manner that night, a gentle, pathetic eloquence which brought glistening tears into the eyes of more than one of the little throng of listeners. For he spoke of death, and of the leaving behind of all earthly things—of death, and of spiritual death—of the ties between man and woman and man and God. It was all so different to what is generally expected from a preacher with the reputation of eloquence, so devoid of the usual arts of oratory, and yet so

sweetly human, æsthetically beautiful, that when at last, with a few words, in a sense valedictory, he left the pulpit, and the low strains of the organ grew louder and louder, I slipped from my seat and groped across the close with my eyes full of blinding tears. I had a passionate conviction that I had misjudged my father. Suddenly he seemed to loom before my eyes in a new light—the light of a martyr. My judgments concerning him seemed harsh and foolish. Who was I to judge such a man as that? He was as far above me as the stars, and I had refused him my sympathy. He had begged for it, and I had refused it! I had left him to carry his burden alone! It seemed to me then that never whilst I lived could I escape from the bitterness of this sudden whirlwind of regret.

Swiftly though I had walked from the cathedral, he was already in his study when I entered the house. I opened the door timidly. He was sitting in his chair leaning back with half-closed eyes like a man overcome with sudden pain. I fell on my knees by his side and took his fingers in mine.

"Father!" I cried, "I have done my best to keep her away! I have done all that I could!"

His hand pressed mine gently. Then there was a loud ringing at the bell. I sprang up white with fear.

"I will not let her come here!" I cried. "We will say that you are ill! She must go away!"

He shook his head.

"It is useless," he said, quietly; "it must come sooner or later—better now perhaps. Let us wait, I have left word that she is to be shown in here."

There was a brief silence. Then we heard steps in the hall, the rustling of a woman's gown, and the door was opened and closed. She came forward to the edge of the little circle of light thrown around us by my father's reading-lamp. There she stood with a great red spot burning in her cheeks, and a fierce light in her eyes.

"At last, then, the mystery is solved," she cried, triumphantly. "I was a fool or I should have guessed it long ago! Have you forgotten me, Philip Maltabar?"

My father rose to his feet. He was serene but grave.

"No, I have not forgotten you, Olive Berdenstein," he said, slowly. "Yours is not a name to be forgotten by me. Say what you have come to say, please, and go away."

She looked at him in surprise, and laughed shortly.

"Oh, you need not fear," she answered, "I have not come to stay. I recognised you in the cathedral, and I should have been on my way

to the police station by now, but first I promised myself the pleasure of this visit. Your daughter and I are such friends, you know."

My father took up some writing-paper and dipped his pen in the ink as though about to commence a letter.

"I think," he said, "that you had better go now. The police station closes early here, and you will have to hurry as it is—that is, if you wish to get a warrant to-night."

She looked at him fixedly. He certainly had no fear. My heart beat fast with the admiration one has always for a brave man. The girl was being cheated of her triumph.

"You are right," she said, "I must hurry; I am going to them and I shall say I know now who was my brother's murderer! It was Philip Maltabar, the man who calls himself Canon Ffolliot. But though he may be a very holy man, I can prove him to be a murderer!"

"This is rather a hard word," my father remarked, with a faint smile at the corners of his lips.

"It is a true one," she cried, fiercely. "You killed him. You cannot deny it."

"I do not deny it," he answered, quietly. "It is quite true that I killed your brother—or rather that in a struggle between us I struck him a blow from the effects of which he died."

For a long time I had felt that it must be so. Yet to hear him confess it so calmly, and without even the most ordinary emotion, was a shock to me.

"It is the same thing," she said, scornfully, "you killed him!"

"In the eyes of the law it is not the same thing," he answered; "but let that pass. I had warned your brother most solemnly that if he took a certain course I should meet him as man to man, and I should show him no mercy. Yet he persisted in that course. He came to my home! I had warned him not to come. Even then I forbore. His errand was fruitless. He had only become a horror in the eyes of the woman whom he had deceived. She would not see him, she wished never to look upon his face again. He persisted in seeking to force his way into her presence. On that day I met him. I argued and reasoned with him, but in vain. Then the first blow was struck, and only the merest chance intervened, or the situation would have been reversed. Your brother was a coward then, Olive Berdenstein, as he had been all his life. He struck at me treacherously with a knife. Look here!"

He threw open his waistcoat, and she started back with horror. There was a terrible wound underneath the bandage which he removed.

"It was a blow for a blow," he said, gravely. "From my wound I shall in all likelihood die. Your brother's knife touched my lung, and I am always in danger of internal bleeding. The blow I struck him, I struck with his knife at my heart. That is not murder."

"We shall see," she muttered between her lips.

"As soon as you will," he answered. "There is one thing more which you may as well know. My unhappy meeting with your brother on that Sunday afternoon was not our first meeting since his return to England. On the very night of his arrival I met him in London by appointment. I warned him that if he persisted in a certain course I should forget my cloth, and remember only that I was a man and that he was an enemy. He listened in silence, and when I turned to leave he made a cowardly attempt upon my life. He deliberately attempted to murder me. Nothing but an accident saved my life. But I am not telling you these things to gain your pity. Only you have found me out, and you are his sister. It is right that you should know the truth. I have told you the whole story. Will you go now?"

She looked at him, and for a moment she hesitated. Then her eyes met mine, and her face hardened.

"Yes, I will go," she declared. "I do not care

whether you have told me the truth or not. I am going to let the world know who Canon Ffolliot is."

"You will do as seems best to you," my father said, quietly.

He had risen to his feet, and stood with his hand at his side, breathing heavily, in an attitude now familiar to me, although I had never fully understood its cause. His pale lips were twitching with pain, and there were dark rims under his eyes. She looked at him and laughed brutally.

"Your daughter is an excellent actress," she said, looking back over her shoulder as she moved towards the door. "I have no doubt but that the art is inherited. We shall see!"

Obeying my father's gesture, I rang the bell. We heard the front door open and close after her. Then I threw my arms around his neck in a passionate abandonment of grief.

"It is all my fault," I sobbed—"my fault! But for me she would have forgiven."

My father smiled a faint, absent smile. He was smoothing my hair gently with one hand and gazing steadfastly into the fire. His face was serene, almost happy. Yet the blow had fallen.

CHAPTER XXX

THE MASTER OF COLVILLE HALL

I BELIEVE that I took off my clothes and made some pretence of going to bed, but in my memory those long hours between the time when I left my father in the study and the dawn seems like one interminable nightmare. Yet towards morning I must have slept, for my room was full of sunlight when a soft knocking at the door awakened me. Our trim little housemaid entered with a note; the address was in my father's handwriting. I sat up in bed and tore open the envelope eagerly. Something seemed to tell me even before I glanced at its contents that the thing I dreaded was coming to pass. This is what I read.

"Forgive me, child, if I have left you with only a written farewell. The little strength I have left I have need of, and I shrank from seeing you again lest the sorrow of it should sap my purpose; should make me weak when I need to be strong.

The girl will tell her story, and at the best my career of usefulness here is over; so I leave Eastminster this morning for ever. I have written to Alice and to the Bishop. To him I have sent a brief memoir of my life. I do not think that he will be a stern judge, especially as the culprit stands already with one foot in the grave.

"And now, child, I have a final confession to make to you. For many years there has been a side to my life of which you and Alice have been ignorant. Even now I am not going to tell you about it. The time is too short for me to enter thoroughly into my motives and into the gradual development of what was at first only a very small thing. But of this I am anxious to assure you, it is not a disgraceful side! It is not anything of which I am ashamed, although there have been potent reasons for keeping all record of it within my own breast. Had I known to what it was destined to grow I should have acted differently from the commencement, but of that it is purposeless now to speak. The little remnant of life which is still mine I have dedicated to it. Even if my career here were not so clearly over, my conscience tells me that I am doing right in abandoning it. It is possible that we may never meet again. Farewell! If what you hinted at last night comes really to pass it is good. Bruce

Deville has been no friend of mine, but he is as worthy of you as any man could be. And above all, remember this, my fervent prayer: Forgive me the wrong which I have done you and the trouble which I have brought into your life. Think of me if you can only as your most affectionate father,

"HORACE FFOLLIOT."

When I had finished my father's letter I dressed in haste. There was no doubt in my mind as to where he had gone. I would follow him at once. I would be by his side wherever he was and in whatever condition when the end came. I rang for a time-table and looked out the morning trains for London. Then Alice knocked at my door and came to me with white, scared face, and an open letter in her hand. She found me all ready to start.

"Do you understand it? What does it mean, Kate?" she asked, fearfully.

"I do not know," I answered. "He has gone to London, and he is not fit to leave his bed. I am going to follow him."

"But you do not know whereabouts to look. You will never find him."

"I must trust to fate," I answered, desperately. "Somehow or other I shall find him. Goodbye. I have only a few minutes to catch the train."

She came to the door with me.

"And you?" I asked, upon the step.

"I shall remain here," she answered, firmly. "I shall not leave until it is perfectly certain that this is not all some hideous mistake. I can't realise it. Kate."

"Yes," I cried, lingering impatiently upon the step.

"Do you think that he is mad?"

I shook my head. "I am certain that he is not," I answered. "I will write to you; perhaps to-night. I may have news."

I walked across the close, where as yet not a soul was stirring. The ground beneath my feet was hard with a white frost, and the air was keen and bright. The sunlight was flashing upon the cathedral windows, the hoar-covered ivy front of the deanery gleamed like silver, and a little group of tame pigeons lit at my feet and scarcely troubled to get out of the way of my hasty footsteps. A magnificent serenity reigned over the little place. It seemed as though the touch of tragedy could scarcely penetrate here. Yet as I turned into the main street of the still sleeping town my heart gave a great leap and then died away within me. A few yards ahead was the familiar fur-coated little figure, also wending her way towards the station.

She turned round at the ringing sound of my

footsteps, and her lips parted in a dark, malicious smile. She waited for me, and then walked on by my side.

"He has a two hours' start," she said, "so far as you are concerned; that means that you will not find him. But with me it is different. I found out his flight in time to wire to London. At St. Pancras a detective will meet the train. He will be followed wherever he goes, and word will be sent to me. To-night he will be in prison. Canon Ffolliot, you know—your father—in prison! I wonder, will the wedding be postponed? Eh?"

She peered up into my face. I kept my eyes steadily fixed upon the end of the street where the station was, and ground my teeth together. The only notice I took of her was to increase my pace so that she could scarcely keep up with me. I could hear her breath coming sharply as she half walked, half ran along at my side. Then, at last, as we came in sight of the station, my heart gave a great leap, and a little exclamation of joy broke upon my lips. A man was standing under the portico with his face turned towards us. It was Bruce Deville.

She too gave vent to a little exclamation which sounded almost like a moan. For the first time I glanced into her face. Her lips were quivering, her dark eyes, suddenly dim, were soft with

despair. She caught at my arm and commenced talking rapidly in spasmodic little gasps. Her tone was no longer threatening.

"There is a chance for you," she cried. "You can save your father. You could take him away —to Italy, to the south of France. He would recover. You would never have anything to fear from me again. I should be your friend."

I shook my head.

"It is too late," I said. "You had your chance. I did what you asked."

She shrank back as though I had stabbed her.

"It is not too late," she said, feverishly. "Make it the test of his love. It will not be for ever. I am not strong. I may not live more than a year or two. Let me have him—for that time. It is to save your father. Pray to him. He will consent. He does not dislike me. But, mon Dieu! I will not live without him. Oh, if you knew what it was to love."

I shook my head sorrowfully. Was it unnatural that I should pity her, even though she was my father's persecutor? Before I could speak to her Bruce was by our side. He had come a few steps to meet us. He held my hands tightly.

"I felt sure that you would be coming by this train," he said. "I have the tickets."

"And you?" I asked.

"I am coming with you, of course," he

answered, turning round and walking by my side.

Olive Berdenstein was watching him eagerly. He had not taken the slightest notice of her. A faint flush, which had stolen into her face, faded slowly away. She became deadly white; she moved apart and entered the booking-office. As she stood taking her ticket I caught a backward glance from her dark eyes which made me shiver.

"Why don't you speak to her?" I whispered.

"Why should I?" he answered, coolly. "She is doing her utmost to bring ruin upon you. She is our enemy."

"Not yours."

"If yours, mine," he declared, smiling down upon me. "Isn't that so?"

"Even now she is willing to make terms," I said, slowly, with my eyes fixed upon the approaching train. "She is willing——"

"Well!"

"To spare us, if——"

"Well!"

"If you will give me up."

He laughed mockingly.

"I thought that was all over and done with," he protested. "No one but a couple of girls could have hatched such a plot. I presume you were not going to make any further suggestions of the sort seriously?"

I have never been quite sure whether I had intended to or not. At any rate, his words and expression then convinced me of the utter hopelessness of such an attempt. The train drew up, and he placed me in an empty carriage. He spoke to the guard and then followed me in. The door was locked. Olive Berdenstein walked slowly by and looked into our compartment. I believe she had meant to travel to London with us, but if so her design was frustrated. For the present, at any rate, we were safe from her.

Upon our arrival we took a hansom and drove straight to Victoria Street. My mother was out. We waited impatiently for several hours. She did not return till dusk. Then I told her everything. As she listened to me her face grew white and anxious.

"You know him better than any one else in the world," I cried. "You alone can solve the mystery of his second life. In this letter he speaks of it. Whatever it may be, he has gone back to it now. I want to find him. I must find him. Can't you suggest something that may help me? If you were not in his whole confidence, at least you must have some idea about it."

She shook her head sadly and doubtfully.

"I only knew," she said, "that there was a second life. I knew that it was there, but I had no knowledge of it. If I could help you I would not hesitate for a single moment."

Then, like an inspiration, there flashed into my mind the thought of that man's face whom I had met in the East End of this great city. They had persuaded me into a sort of half belief that I had been mistaken. They were wrong, and I had been right! I remembered his strange apparel and his stern avoidance of me. I had no more doubts. Somewhere in those regions lay that second life of his. I sprang to my feet.

"I know where he is," I cried. "Come!"

They both followed me from the house, and at my bidding Bruce called for a cab. On the way I told them what had become my conviction. When I had finished my mother looked up thoughtfully.

"I do not know," she said. "Of course, it may be no good, but let us try Colville Hall. It is quite close to the place where you say you saw him."

"Colville Hall?" I repeated. "What sort of place is that? The name sounds familiar."

"You will see for yourself," she answered. "It is close here. I will tell the man to stop."

We were in the thick of the East End, when the cab pulled up in front of a large square building, brilliantly illuminated. Great placards were posted upon the walls, and a constant stream of men and women were passing through the wide open doors. Bruce elbowed a way for

us through the crowd, and we found ourselves at last wedged in amongst them, irresistibly carried along into the interior of the great hall. We passed the threshold in a minute or two. Then we paused to take breath. I looked around me with a throb of eager curiosity.

It was a wonderful sight. The room was packed with a huge audience, mostly of men and boys. Nearly all had pipes in their mouths, and the atmosphere of the place was blue with smoke. On a raised platform at the further end several men were sitting, also smoking, and then, with a sudden, swift shock of surprise, I realised that our search was indeed over. One of them was my father, coarsely and poorly dressed, and holding between his fingers a small briar pipe.

Notwithstanding the motley assemblage, the silence in the hall was intense. There were very few women there, and they, as well as the men, appeared to be of the lowest order. Their faces were all turned expectantly towards the platform. One or two of them were whispering amongst themselves, but my father's voice—he had risen to his feet now—sounded clear and distinct above the faint murmuring—we too, held our breath.

"My friends," he said quietly, "I am glad to see so many of you here to-night. I have come a long way to have my last talk with you. Partings are always sad things, and I shall feel

very strange when I leave this hall to-night, to know that in all human probability I shall never set foot in it again. But our ways are made for us, and all that we can do is to accept them cheerfully. To-night, my friends, it is for us to say farewell."

Something of the sort seemed to have been expected, yet there were a good many concerned and startled faces; a little half-protesting, half-kindly murmur of negation.

"Gar on! You're not a-going to leave us, gov'nor!"

My father shook his head, smiling faintly. Notwithstanding his rough attire, the delicacy of his figure and the statuesque beauty of his calm, pale face were distinctly noticeable. With an irresistible effort of memory I seemed to see once more the great cathedral, with its dim, solemn hush, the shadows around the pillars, and the brilliantly lit chancel, a little oasis of light shining through the gloom. The perfume of the flowers, and the soft throbbing music of the great organ seemed to be floating about on the thick, noxious air. Then my father, his hand pressed to his side, and his face soft with a wonderful tenderness, commenced his farewell address to these strange-looking people.

Very soon I had forgotten where I was. My eyes were wet with tears, and my heart was

aching with a new pain. The gentle, kindly, eloquence, the wan face, with its irresistible sweet smile, so human, so marvellously sympathetic, was a revelation to me. It was a farewell to a people with whom he must have been brought into vivid and personal communion, a message of farewell, too, to others of them who were not there. It was a sermon—did they think of it as a sermon, I wonder?—to the like of which I had certainly never listened before, which seemed to tell between the lines as though with a definite purpose the story of his own sorrows and his own sins. In that great hall there was no sound, save those slow words vibrating with nervous force, which seemed each one of them to leave him palpably the weaker. Some let their pipes go out, others smoked stolidly on, with their faces steadfastly fixed upon that thin, swaying figure. The secret of his long struggle with them and his tardy victory seemed to become revealed to us in their attitude towards him and their reverent silence. One forgot all about their unwashed faces and miserable attire, the foul tobacco smoke, and the hard, unsexed-looking women who listened with bowed heads as though ashamed to display a very unusual emotion. One remembered only that the place was holy.

The words of farewell were spoken at last.

He did not openly speak of death, yet I doubt whether there was one of them who did not divine it. He stood upon the little platform holding out his hands towards them, and they left their places in orderly fashion, yet jealously eager to be amongst the first to clasp them, and somehow we three felt that it was no place for us, and we made our way out again on to the pavement. My mother and I looked at one another with wet eyes.

"At last, then," I murmured, "we know his secret. Would to God that we had known before."

"It is wonderful," my mother answered, "that he has escaped recognition. There has been so much written about this place lately. Only last week I was asked to come here. Every one has been talking about the marvellous influence he has gained over these people."

We waited there for him. In little groups the congregation came slowly out and dispersed. The lights in the main body of the building were extinguished. Still he did not come. We were on the point of seeking for a side entrance when a man came hurriedly out of the darkened building and commenced running up the street. Something seemed to tell me the truth.

"That man has gone for a doctor," I cried. "See, he has stopped at the house with the red lamp. He is ill! I am going inside."

I tried the door. It opened at my touch and we groped our way across the unlit room, bare and desolate enough now with its rows of empty and disarranged chairs, and with little clouds of dense tobacco smoke still hanging about. In a little recess behind the platform we found my father. One man—a cabman he seemed to be—was holding his hand; another was supporting his head. When he saw us he smiled faintly.

"God is very good," he murmured. "There was nothing I wished for but to see you once more."

I dropped on my knees by his side. There was a mist before my eyes and a great lump in my throat.

"You are worse," I cried. "Have they sent for a doctor?"

"It is the end," he said, softly. "It will all be over very soon now. I am ready. My work here was commenced. It is not granted to any one to do more than to make commencements. Give—give—ah!"

The flutter of a gown close at hand disturbed me. I followed my father's eyes. Olive Berdenstein had glided from a dark corner underneath one of the galleries, and was coming like a wraith towards us. I half rose to my feet in a fit of passionate anger. Bruce, too, had taken a hasty step towards her.

"Can't you see you are too late?" he whispered

to her hoarsely. "Go away from here. It is no place for you."

"Too late," she murmured, softly, and then the sound of heavy footsteps coming up the hall made us all look round and my heart died away within me. Two men in plain clothes were within a few yards of us; a policeman followed close behind. My father closed his eyes, and from the look of horror in his face I knew how he had dreaded this thing. One of the men advanced to Olive Berdenstein, and touched his hat. I can hear her voice now.

"I am sorry, Mr. Smith," she said, "I have made a mistake. This is not the man."

There was a dead silence for a minute or two, and then a little murmur of voices which reached me as though from a great distance. I heard the sound of their retreating footsteps. I caught a glimpse of Olive Berdenstein's tear-stained face as she bent for a moment over my father's prostrate figure.

"I forgive," she whispered. "Farewell."

Then she followed them out of the hall, and we none of us saw her any more. But there was a light in my father's face like the light which is kindled by a great joy. One hand I kept, the other my mother clasped. He looked up at us and smiled.

"This," he said, "is happiness."

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